

How Do You Spell Love?

1/22/23

Managing Realistic Expectations

Sunday AM

If you were here last Sunday, you might remember that we talked about the *essentials* of marriage/family from Proverbs 3. Today, I want to turn our attention to the *expectations* we should have w/in our homes.

What is an **expectation**? By definition, it's looking forward w/ belief/anticipation to something occurring or to someone coming thru on what's hoped/promised.

Yet expectations can oftentimes be tough to deal w/.

When I was in college, we had a message board in the student center where students could leave notes of encouragement to each other. One AM, I left a note to a girl I liked hoping to encourage her and score some brownie points. My note simply read – 1 Samuel 12:24 – Joey. Later that afternoon, expecting this girl to thank me for my note, instead, she smacked me on the arm in disgust – and said, “I can’t believe the verse you gave me!” I said, “What? It’s a great verse – it says... *Only fear the Lord and serve Him, for consider what great things He has done.*” She said, “No it doesn’t!” So, I pulled out my Bible and showed her the verse – and she was mortified. Instead of looking up 1 Samuel 12:24, she looked up 2 Samuel 12:24 – which has an entirely different focus. It reads, “David comforted his wife Bathsheba and went and lay w/ her.” UHH! Let’s just say neither of our expectations was met that day.

SEE – sometimes, our expectations are inaccurate b/c our logic is flawed and our biases, hopes, and desires are misplaced. Sometimes, *we get our hopes up* based on a false premise or b/c we’ve misread the situation. The interesting thing about forming expectations is that, oftentimes, we do this w/out conscious effort. So, when our expectations go unmet, we get disappointed and our feelings get hurt. And this leads to us placing the blame on someone or something who didn’t live up to our expectations – even if our expectations were unreasonable and unknown.

I’m not sure if you’re aware of this, but *the Bible has much to say about expectations.* It speaks of us living in anticipation of Christ’s return. It speaks to having reasonable/unreasonable expectations of God, others, and ourselves. It even says that it’s not unrealistic for us to have hopeful expectations of our spouse/kids.

WTM – let’s look again at Ephesians 5. Listen to what Paul says to **everyone** – which is our spiritual baseline:

¹*Imitate God in everything you do, b/c you are His children. And live a life filled w/ love, following the example of Christ – who loved us and offered Himself as a sacrifice for us, a pleasing aroma to God...*

¹⁵*Be careful how you live. Don’t live like fools, but like those who are wise by making the most of every opportunity in these evil days. Don’t act w/out thought, but understand what the Lord wants you to do. Don’t be drunk w/ wine, b/c that will ruin your life. Instead, be filled w/ the H.S., singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs among yourselves, and making music to the Lord in your hearts. And give thanks for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. And further, submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.*

In this text, Paul offers us a number of reasonable expectations regarding life/relationships when we accept Christ as Savior and follow Him as Lord. ***Expectations that impact every earthly relationship.***

He calls each of us to imitate Christ by living a life that expresses God’s love in us to others.

He calls us to live wisely in search of God’s will/best for our lives – not foolishly, selfishly, or thoughtlessly.

He calls us to NOT live under the influence of our fleshly desires but to live after the leading of the H.S.

He calls us to live gracious and thankful lives – appreciative of God’s blessings.

He calls us to mutually submit to one another out of respect for each other as children of God.

DYK these statements are *reasonable expectations* we’re to have for each other if we profess Christ.

SEE – if we’ve received Jesus as Savior, then we also should expect Him to be our Lord/Master too.

Can I point out (1) particular phrase – *mutually submit*.

mutually submit (*hupotasso*) to place under in an orderly fashion. It is a military term of alignment.

SEE – as Jesus-followers, we should be willing to not only place ourselves under Jesus and the Scriptures – We should be willing to voluntarily humble ourselves before others to align together under God.

It’s from this disposition of our willingness to submit to God’s ways we find the instruction for the family.

²² *For wives, this means submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For a husband is the head of his wife as Christ is the head of the church. He is the Savior of his body, the church. As the church submits to Christ, wives should submit to their husbands in every way.*

Now, we touched on this 2 weeks ago. This is an impossible command unless a wife knows Christ as Savior and is living under the influence of the H.S. in an abiding life. Why? B/c all the way back in Genesis at the fall, God cursed women w/ pain in childbirth and a desire to be in authority over their husbands. Thus, the only way for her to align w/ God, His will, and her husband – is to live under the leading of the H.S.

Yet her calling is to *voluntarily align* herself under her husband, not b/c she’s less than capable or unequal to him, but b/c she understands that this is God’s order for the family to work as God designed it.

SEE – in God’s eyes, men/women are totally equal and absolutely culpable for themselves before God – yet w/in the family they both have unique roles/duties essential for the family to work. So... this passage has nothing to do w/ superior to inferior – nor does it demean or take from a women’s dignity; in fact, it’s just the opposite – it enhances it.

Regarding expectations – it means a husband should expect his wife to be strong, self-assured, competent, and confident enough to walk alongside Him and to share life as she would walk in step w/ Christ.

He should expect her to NOT be a pushover – but for the sake of their family, challenge and encourage Him to be the best husband, father, and leader he can be.

Listen MEN – if your idea is that your wife is to be your servant (barefoot/pregnant) or some milk-toast appendage to your life – you need to spend some time reading about the “*Proverbs 31 woman.*” See – God’s expectation for His girls is that they’re bodaciously, godly – and capable of keeping you in-line w/ His will.

Then to the men – Paul writes...

²⁵ *For husbands, this means love your wives, just as Christ loved the church. He gave up His life for her to make her holy/clean, cleansing her by the His Word. He did this to present her to himself as a glorious church w/out a spot or wrinkle or any other blemish – for her to be holy and w/out fault. In the same way, husbands ought to love their wives as they love their own bodies. When a man loves his wife, he actually shows love for*

himself. No one hates his own body but feeds and cares for it, just as Christ cares for the church... As the Scriptures say, "A man will leave his father and mother and will be joined to his wife, and the two will become united into one."

As mentioned 2 weeks ago – for a man to love His wife as God loves requires the man to know Christ as Savior and to walk under the influence of the H.S. too.

It means His wife can expect that he loves/cares for her and treats her as God treats her. It means He understands His duty under Christ to be the spiritual leader and head of the family – never shucking this responsibility. It means that he seeks to align w/ his wife under God and to put his wife/kids before himself... AND I COULD GO ON!

Point – expectations based on human assumptions can often cause trouble, whereas expectations based on God's truth can bring joy, fulfillment, and blessing.

Example – when a man/woman get married, they both carry expectations into the marriage. The woman may see evidence that b/c her husband is caring, kind, and patient w/ others, so, he'll be the same to her and as a dad to their kids. Or the man might think that b/c his wife's mom is a great cook, she will be too. Yet, if he doesn't turn out to be a patient husband/dad or she doesn't turn out to be a particularly good cook, they both may feel let down. And now, this couple is faced w/ dealing w/ hurt feelings/resentment based entirely on what they had *hoped* would be. Yet, there was no promise made in either case – and still, they both feel as if they've been deceived. Why? It's b/c they chose faulty human expectations to define their relationship instead of sound, biblical expectations.

Then to the parents and kids – Paul writes...

¹ Children, obey your parents b/c you belong to the Lord, for this is the right thing to do. "Honor your father/mother." This is the 1st commandment w/ a promise: If you honor your father/mother, "things will go well for you, and you will have a long life on the earth." Fathers, don't provoke your children to anger by the way you treat them. Rather, bring them up w/ the discipline/instruction in the Lord.

Notice the expectations on the kids is to obey/honor. To **obey** comes from the Greek word (*hupakouo*) from which we get **acoustic** – meaning to hear under – meaning to do as you are told.

honor refers to the respectable disposition we have toward our parents. It refers to the willingness a child has to align under their parents b/c of their love/respect for them due to who their parents are and the position they have in their lives.

Yet this doesn't occur naturally either. From out of the womb, every child is born w/ a will seeking their place in this world – yet God calls them to be bridled under their parents until their spirit is broken for usefulness to society. And so, their calling, and a parent's calling, is one of preparation for life.

How does this translate to expectations? Simple – Godly parents should expect their children to obey and honor in response to their godly parenting/influence.

And children should expect their parents to walk w/ the Lord and to dispense truth/discipline to prepare them for life outside the home. In both cases, this relationship is motivated by our intimacy/dependence on Christ and by the principles we learned in vs. 1-20.

Bottomline – God has offered every home basic, realistic expectations to thrive. Still, any time there's mutual dependency, human expectations will exist – and if those expectations are not met, then conflict/challenge will likely be the result. But if you start right, you're more likely to end right – especially w/ regard to expectations.

So, let me offer (3) basic expectations for families:

1 – Expect **PURSUIT** not Perfection

Listen – there’s no such thing as a perfect marriage or a perfect family. Think about it – *has there ever been a honeymoon in history that lasted forever?* Nope!

No one is perfect, but based on this text, we can expect that our spouses/kids *pursue God* and *pursues us*.

Dr. Howard Hendricks, prof at DTS, was once asked how he and his wife had been so successful in marriage – he said, “It’s simple, we **expect** only (2) things from each other. We expect each other to have an unwavering commitment to Christ – and we expect each other to have an unwavering commitment to us.”

Notice – he didn’t say they expected perfection. They didn’t expect specific roles/duties. They expected that they love God 1st and each other next.

I wonder how many families could be salvaged if spouses/kids would love God 1st and each other next.

2 – Expect **PRESENCE** not Platitudes

I’m going to make this simple – **TALK IS CHEAP!**

If you want your marriage/family to work, **be present**. Be there to give each other uninterrupted face time.

Truth is – marriage/family is hard. And it doesn’t take much, if anything, to have a bad marriage or family, but it does require attentiveness, transparency, and connection to have a good one. BTW – do you know why marriage/family is hard? It’s b/c it involves people! People who often have differing expectations

But to have the commitment to be present/engaged is essential. See – intimacy is born out of hard work to take an interest and to be transparent w/ each other, not by drifting into inattentiveness/indifference. **SEE** – we’ll only get out of our marriage/family what we we’re willing to put into it.

The scary part is, too often, when we don’t get from our spouse/kids/parents what we think we *should*, we often don’t give to the marriage/family what we *could*.

3 – Expect **PROMISE** not Preference

When Meg and I got married, we didn’t say – *I do*. We said *I promise*. We said *I promise* b/c we understood that we were entering into a covenant relationship w/ each other – a legal, binding contract under God that’s for more than better or for worse, richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health – until death do we part.

She’s stuck w/ me and I’m stuck w/ her. In fact, we fall into the category of divorce is never an option – although murder might be. Ha!

Seriously – if I go home today to find Meg packing a suitcase to leave, I’m getting my suitcase out too – b/c wherever she’s going, I’m going too. (and vice versa) after all, we’re not leaving the other w/ all these kids.

Why? b/c we’ve committed ourselves to live faithfully under God to God together – thus, *our marriage is not based on preferences*. Sure – we have them, but we’ve committed that our preferences will neither define our relationship nor dissolve our relationship.

Can I tell you the vast majority of marriages/families I counsel to save most often are in peril b/c of nothing more than selfish, silly preferences?

As a result, rather than setting aside their preferences to put the marriage/family and the other person before them, they clamp down on their own wants/whims to the detriment of the relationship.

Listen – NO Marriage or family can survive the priority of personal preference over selfless promise. **US** always comes before me, myself, and I.

YES – *every relationship has expectations*. Yet how we manage these expectations will largely determine the quality/character of our family – which, in turn, often dictates the direction/quality of one's life.

So, what can you realistically expect of your family?

1 – You can expect them to pursue God and pursue you – but you can't expect them to be perfect.

2 – You can expect them to be actively present and fully engaged, giving you their full attention in both their words and actions.

3 – You can expect your family to fulfill their promises by choosing to serve the marriage/family over prioritizing their personal preferences.