

BONUS SESSION TWO

Expectations: Teamwork Challenged

By Sue Addington

EXPECTATIONS—REAL AND UNREAL

IT WAS A BEAUTIFUL SUMMER AFTERNOON and the backyard beckoned. Our three young children were quietly napping, but we were soon “snapping” at each other.

I started, “You are gone all week with this job, and when you come home I need a break! I am exhausted. Why are you not rescuing me?”

He responded, “But my hours away are completely packed with meetings and business events—from early morning through late each night. I am tired too. Can’t I just chill when I get home?”

What followed was a conversation so long that we both ended up with painful sunburns. Thanks to the sleeping children and attentive listening to each other’s thoughts that day, the friction we’d both been feeling was eased a bit. We ended that never-forgotten conversation with fresh perspective each of us had not stopped to consider before. We realized we both had expected the other to know what we needed, know what we wanted, and just do it.

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Change took time, but expectations were adjusted beginning that day. Thirty-five years later we are still adjusting.

According to Dennis Rainey, there are at least 25 areas in which couples will be challenged regarding their expectations. Which ones ring some bells in your own marriage:

- Finances
- Relating to the opposite sex
- Loneliness
- In-laws
- Romance and affection
- Spiritual growth together
- Roles of husband and wife
- Communication
- Values and lifestyle choices
- Trials and suffering
- Where to attend church
- Differences
(male/female, backgrounds, religious training, cultural)
- Travel
- Debt
- Children
- Entertainment
- Weekends
- Traditions
(holidays, birthdays, and other celebrations)
- Resolving conflict
- Work and Career
- Vacations
- Priorities (schedule)
- Sexual intimacy
- Roles of mother and father
- Selfishness

Doctors Sarì Harrar and Rita DeMaria have concluded together,

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“Unspoken, half-hidden expectations about married life put wives and husbands to the test... These ‘rules’ form in childhood and our teen years as we watch our parents’ marriages and absorb silent imperatives about the roles of husbands and wives from society; from our cultural and religious affiliations; and from TV shows, movies, and books. Previous romances and even friendships further shape our expectations. And at a deeper level, we often believe our spouses will somehow intuit and heal our wounds.”

How about you and your spouse? Are there unrealistic expectations lurking below the surface? Are those expectations and disappointments rooted in your past?

Could your expectations be tangled in “romantic” ideas of what marriage should be? Concerning a young bride’s wedding night, another woman wisely advised, “Just remember. It’s not like in the movies!”

Are your unreal expectations there because you find yourself comparing your spouse or your marriage to others with whom you rub shoulders? Do you catch yourself thinking “the grass looks greener on the other side”? IF ONLY our marriage was AS happy...exciting...fun...godly...financially secure as the Jones’ marriage!

Unreal expectations in marriage do not surprise God. One of the primary stories He’s chosen to write for our benefit, warning, and example brings human nature clearly to the forefront.

Didn’t Abraham and Sarah both deal with unreal expectations? He expected his wife to play along with a self-serving lie, not once but twice; she expected her husband to give her a child with a servant girl, clearly outside God’s promised plan. It’s good that they chose to make their adjustments to realistic and godly expectations, isn’t it? In the end, both are praised by name in the Hebrews 11 list of God’s faithful.

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So what can be done in the here and now when our own unreal, unmet expectations trip us up?

Certainly we can BEGIN with these three basic steps:

1. Communicate expectations first to the Creator alone and/or together. Ask Him about what is realistic and what is not. Ask for His patience and wisdom as you address these expectations with His Word as your guide.
2. Communicate to one another as He leads, being patient and humble as you grow together and adjust to one another's unique gifting and roles.
3. Expect God's GREAT things in your marriage. After all, your union is patterned after the glorious Godhead. Confidently, excitedly, expect God to work.

Husbands and wives, have hope. Don't let disappointments and unmet expectations get you down. The Divine Artist Himself has promised that He who began a good work in you will be faithful to complete it. And thankfully that includes your spouse.



Small Group Discussion

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Which TV, movie, or media-famous couple live out a life that you envy?

- The peaceful Ingalls in *Little House on the Prairie*?
 - The exciting spy couple of Mr. and Mrs. Smith?
 - The funny and friendly Huxtables?
 - The glamorous Prince William and new bride, Kate, of London fame?
 - Athletic, beautiful, and rich David and Victoria Beckham?
 - The godly Billy and Ruth Graham?
 - Do any others come to mind?
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- Do you wish your marriage was more like your parents' marriage? Has that required an adjustment in your own marriage as you compare yours to theirs?
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- Which of you tends to be the more "romantic" in terms of what you expected early on in your marriage?

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- Have you deliberately patterned your marriage after another healthy marriage that you watch regularly? Who are they? What might be a challenge in trying to be like another couple who happen to be two different people from you and your spouse?

- How does Philippians 2:1-9 speak to husbands and wives about dealing with the challenge of disappointments and unmet expectations?

- Does thinking about Abraham and Sarah and their relationship challenges encourage you regarding expectations? How?

- In what ways does the early material in this study on God's Divine Portrait for marriage, regarding His carefully crafted roles, help in assessing unreal expectations as they arise in your marriage?



Take it Home

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Ask each other these questions. The goal is not just to get through them, but to take time to talk...and to listen...as a couple.

- From the article, read through the list of 25 challenges on page 102 out loud together. Separately choose the two top challenges you each feel your marriage faces. Share your two with each other and spend some time talking about ways to address those challenges.
 - On a scale of one to ten, together grade yourselves as a couple in:
 - Communicating with God about your marriage expectations.
 - Communicating with each other about your expectations.
 - Expecting great things from God and His works in your unique marriage.

Notes:

- Family Life Today®—*Twenty-Five Great Expectations for Your Marriage*, Wednesday, September 25, 2002
- Reader's Digest (RD.com) *Fight Unrealistic Expectations—Learn to love your imperfect marriage*, Sari Harrar and Rita DeMaria