

## **The ABCs of Expectations**

*By Katrina J. Cummins, MEd.*

If you went to eat at an Italian restaurant, what type of food would you expect to eat? You look over the menu and see that grilled tofu salad is the only entree served, how would you feel? Shocked. Frustrated. Disappointed. Now, don't get me wrong. I actually really enjoy tofu but when I walk into an Italian restaurant I am *expecting* certain food to satisfy my Italian taste buds. Generally speaking, I am not expecting grilled tofu.

We all have expectations which can be the driving force behind our emotions, thoughts and behavior. Expectations are what you think should happen in life. We all have "should's" in our lives. My husband 'should' pick up his clothes from his side of the bed. Our children 'should' speak in love to each other. My mother-in-law 'should' only call once a day (or for some of you once a month). Expectations are not wrong, but sometimes our expectations are so far from reality that we set ourselves up for failure and disappointment. Sometimes we expect life to turn out better than is possible. The truth of it is, we all live in a broken world and in messy relationships.

Have you walked into a situation in life which felt like it didn't meet your expectations? Maybe a friendship disappointed you. Or a meeting didn't turn out as you were hoping. When I get home from a night out with friends, my husband usually asks me something like, "How did it go?" or "Did you have a good time?" My answer depends on how the event matched the picture in my head of what I was expecting.

Wrong expectations can be very dangerous, especially in our relationships. If we have unrealistic and wrong expectations then disappointment, frustration or anger can suffocate us and our relationships. For example, if you are married, what expectations do you have of your husband? I remember in our first year of marriage I had an expectation that Brad and I would go grocery shopping together. I found out that Brad would rather have a root canal than go shopping! From my perspective I was shocked and felt hurt. The picture in my head was that Brad and I could have some quality time together, enjoying the different sights and sounds at our local produce market. Through healthy communication we talked through our expectations and we had to compromise. Shopping may not seem like a big issue in the grand scheme of life, but when we do not talk about our expectations, resentment and bitterness can grow like cancer, taking over ever so slowly in a deadly way.

For your life, what expectations do you have? What can you expect from God? Do you have a right expectation of who God is and what He can provide? On the other hand, do you try to make God fit into your picture?

I was talking with a woman a few weeks ago, and she was mad at God because she caught every red light driving to work and consequently was late for a meeting. She expressed her anger towards God because He didn't change the lights to green. In listening to her, she had a pretty clear expectation of God; to fix her bad time management by giving her green traffic lights. In her mind she felt that God abandoned her. Expectations are not bad but sometimes, when we have wrong expectations of God, our ideas about life and God can be way off the mark.

If you ask the right questions, you will find the right answers. So, let's ask some questions about expectations. What does the bible tell us in regards to what we can expect from God? What are the truths about God that "should" be our anchor in life?

What are the ABCs of expectations that we can choose to guide our lives?

## **A**lways have the right expectations of God.

We need to have the right picture of God, specifically to know who He is and what that means in having a relationship with Him. Some people see God as a magic genie to give them what ever they desire. But God is the creator of the universe. We were made in His image to serve and be in relationship with Him. What we can expect from God are His promises and we can choose to cling to them while living in this broken world.

You can expect:

- God to be your refuge (Psalm 7 v 1)
- God to sustain you (Psalm 3 v 5)
- God's unfailing love to be trustworthy (Psalm 13 v 5)
- To be filled with joy in His presence (Psalm 16 v 11)
- For Him to be your strength (Psalm 18 v 1)
- To fear no evil (Psalm 23 v 4)
- God to guide you (Psalm 23 v 3)
- For all the ways of the Lord to be loving and faithful (Psalm 25 v 10)
- Peace to guard your hearts and minds (Philippians 4 v 7)
- To live by faith, not by sight (1 Corinthians 5 v 7)
- That love will never fail (1 Corinthians 13 v 8)
- That the battle is the Lord's, not yours (2 Chronicles 20 v 15)
- That the mind controlled by the Spirit produces life and peace (Romans 8 v 6)
- To bear much fruit when you remain in Christ (John 15 v 5)

This list is not exhaustive, just a few examples to encourage you in some of the promises that you have been given by God. Guard your heart and mind so that your picture of God is accurate according to the bible. When we try to fit God into our distorted view of who we think God should be, we will never know who He truly is.

## **B**elieve in what you can expect – doubt and fear then has no foothold.

Every person is defined by something in life. What you believe in will be the driving force in your life. Clinging to God's promises and what you can expect from Him will help you stand in the truth in life. When you are not anchored in the truth, doubt and fear can grow and take over your thoughts and affect your choices. When fear crawls into your thinking and doubt covers you like a blanket, come back to the promises of God and super glue your thoughts to God's truth. The truth will set you free. Sometimes it can feel hard to believe in promises that don't relieve us from direct pain. God is concerned about you growing and stepping out in faith, which can feel hard in challenging and scary situations. We can all do life on a good day, the question is what will you believe during tough times? Do you expect God to guide you even when you can't see the next step in front of you? Do you expect God to be your strength and sustain you despite the overwhelming situation you are in? Do you expect God to heal your broken relationships? Believe and stand in the truths of God and what you can expect from Him.

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## heck in with your expectations.

Life is an organic process and change is something that we can always expect in life. Because there is so much change in life, we need to do a periodical check in with our expectations to make sure they are healthy and founded in God's truth. Be sensitive to your 'check expectations' light on the dashboard of your soul. Life is tough on a good day and when we are going through situations we can make problems worse when we have perfect, unrealistic or wrong expectations. Sometimes we need to replace and refine our expectations, which can feel tough and really hard. I encourage you to check in with your expectations when going into a situation. For example, if you are going to meet your friend for coffee, what are you expecting from getting together? Are you expecting fun, laughter, sharing your pain or just some good coffee? If you expect to share a tough emotional situation you are going through, then mention that from the get go. Maybe say something like, "I am really struggling with feeling unloved right now. Would you be willing if I just shared how I am doing? This may feel like I am needing your support right now and the truth of it is, I am". Going into the conversation this way your friend will know what you need from her. She may have had an expectation of doing all the talking, instead of listening. When we are open and flexible with our expectations, we can allow the Holy Spirit to be at work in our heart. If you live with the expectation that people will hurt you, disappoint you, or abandon you, you will never be disappointed. If you live with the expectation that only God can fulfill and make you whole, your whole attitude and focus will change towards real personal growth as you seek Him for identity and meaning.

Expectations affect our personal growth, spirituality and relationships. If we are going to grow we need to make a daily commitment to become healthy, and expectations are like the steering wheel on our journey. Growth is not an automatic process as it takes energy, time, commitment and focus. At times it feels hard and overwhelming but we are called to live each day with purpose and intention.

Today is the best day of your life as it is the only day you have to live. Live each day with appropriate expectations, expectations that will give you life and a fullness that has been promised to you by God. Guard your expectations as they are the driving force in so many areas of your life.

### **Questions for personal reflection.**

- 1) Write down five expectations that you have in life.
- 2) After looking over your list, are they appropriate expectations? If not, what realistic expectations could you replace them with?
- 3) What spiritual expectations would create more personal freedom in your life?
- 4) This week, what appropriate expectations can you have from God in your life? What promises can you stand by this week? Sometime this week spend some time reading the bible and write down ten promises from God to help you be more anchored during difficult times.
- 5) If you changed one expectation in your marriage or a relationship, how would this bring about a healthier relationship?

## **Prayer**

Dear Heavenly Father,

Thank you for loving me. Teach me to have the right expectations of you and how to live my life. I ask that you would give me a desire to read your word so that your truth can set me free from the lies that hold me captive. Thank you for promising to never leave me, no matter how hard life feels at times. Give me the eyes to see people how you see them and show me that your love can heal every pain in my life. Protect my heart and the expectations that I have of you. Please give me the right picture of who you are and how to live each day .

Amen.

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