

# JUST WHAT DO YOU EXPECT ?

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**T**he beautiful countryside quickly passed us by as we sped along, hand in hand, planning our wedding ceremony. Our marriage, a new life together, and our entire future lay before us. Although I loved Bill with all my heart, I was aware of a sinking feeling growing within. Hard as I tried, I could not shake it. What if I was headed for failure as a wife?

After several miles of silence I finally blurted out my feelings. "I'm not sure I can do all that you expect of me!"

Surprised, my fiancé replied, "Just what do you think I want you to be?" I started the list. "A good cook, a perfect hostess, your best friend, an immaculate housekeeper, and your spiritual companion. Let's see. Then I have to find time to continue working 30 hours a week, get involved in church, do the laundry, buy the groceries, listen to what's happening in your life, show you love and affection

...." Seeing his astonishment, I stopped.

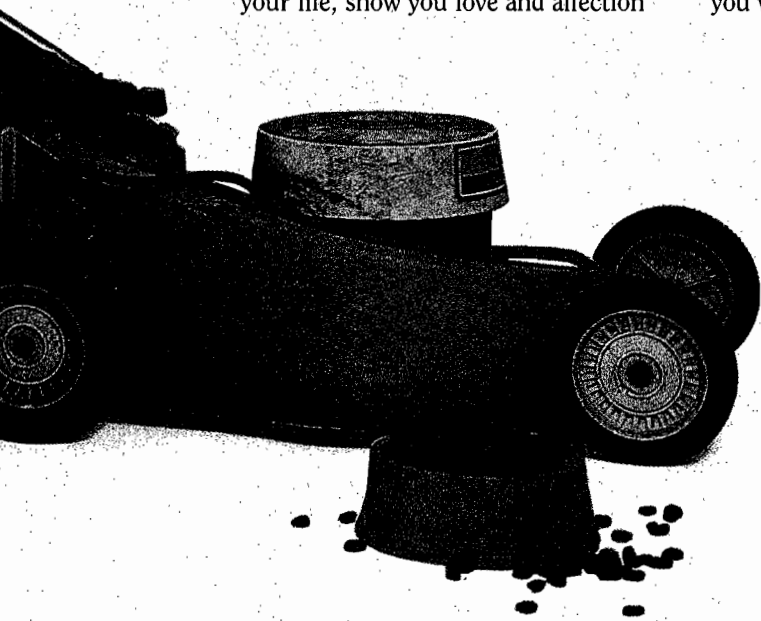
"Did I say that I anticipated all those things?" he asked gently. "W-w-well no. I just assumed that you did!"

The ensuing discussion taught me a lesson. Incorrect expectations are dangerous and can be destructive.

**W**ebster's Dictionary defines an expectation as, among other things, "the act of anticipating or looking for as due." When we have expectations of another person, we are anticipating a certain behavior that we deem appropriate. These expectations hold forth both positive and negative results. Let's examine some of them.

Suppose an aching tooth drives you to make a dental appointment. When you arrive at the dentist's office you have certain preconceived ideas of what you will experience. If a monkey wearing a white lab coat and wielding an electric drill met you at the door, you would retreat, knowing something

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was amiss. Your expectations would have served you well!

Again, suppose you are experiencing dental discomfort. You arrive at the dentist's office anticipating an absolutely pain-free procedure. As you feel the first needle stick and sense the surrounding tissue begin to numb, you feel violated. Why this is not at all painless! You are angry and disappointed. You decide that you will never again visit a dentist. Because your expectations (realistic or not) were unfulfilled, they have produced negative results.

Most of us do not limit our expectations to situations involving the dentist. Because expectations come into play in every area of life, let's take a look at how these anticipations affect our interpersonal relationships.

**I**magine that it is December 24th. You are frantically trying to choose those last minute gifts. As you negotiate a path through the maze of shoppers, someone accidentally bumps into you. You drop all your parcels. If this stranger stops, retrieves your packages, and apologizes, you are mollified. If he walks on, ignoring your plight, you are probably indignant. But what if that stranger had been your best friend or your brother? Your expectations would have changed. If he had continued on his way, consciously disregarding your dilemma, you would have been furious! Who knows what might have resulted?

The point is this: familiarity causes our expectations to grow. We expect more from a friend than from a stranger. We expect more from a sister than from a friend. We expect more from a spouse than from a sister. But are these heightened expectations valid?

God has not left us ignorant concerning how to treat one another and what to expect from one another. From Paul's writings to the Colossians, (3:12-17) we glean several standards. We should be compassionate, kind, humble, gentle, and patient. We should be supportive toward each other. We should be forgiving and loving, living peaceful and thankful lives. We should teach and encourage one another. Above all, we should live our lives to the glory of God.

**T**hat's quite a list! What does it have to do with expectations? When we live our lives in a manner that pleases God, our expectations for others, whether an acquaintance or an intimate friend, will diminish. When our emphasis is on how we should behave toward a rude stranger or what we can do to lighten our neighbor's load, the issue of how we expect others to treat us fades in importance.

Let's look at Paul's exhortations again. When we consider them carefully, an important fact emerges. They all deal with how we should conduct ourselves, not with what we should expect from others! God in all wisdom knows that correcting our own attitudes will produce more harmony than will trying to make our neighbors conform to our expectations.

Some expectations are profitable. We expect fellow motorists to obey the traffic laws. When they do, there are seldom collisions. We expect our children to obey us. When they do, they learn self-control. However, expectations that are unreasonable or unbiblical can be devastating.

**U**nfair expectations kill emotions. I have a dear Christian friend named Sally. Sally has had

unreasonable expectations for her husband ever since they were married five years ago. Jim has not been able to satisfy Sally's demands. Because Sally has been constantly disappointed by Jim, her passion for him has died. Last week she filed for divorce. Her love died a slow death, killed by her expectations.

Undue expectations hinder communication. When my husband disappoints me, that is, when he does not conform to what I think he should do, I put up a wall between us. Until this barrier is removed, significant conversation halts. Unfair expectations squelch communication.

Excessive expectations deny others the freedom of being themselves. When an actor assumes a role and appears on stage, he no longer has the liberty to be himself. He must meet the expectations of the director and the audience by playing his assigned character. Similarly, when we force others into a role that we expect, we are destroying their uniqueness.

**I**mpractical expectations deny God's intervention in a person's life. There is a popular Christian song that states "If you don't like what you see, be patient. God's not finished with me yet." Philippians 2:13 teaches that, as believers, God is at work in each one of us. Do not force others to live up to your expectations. Allow them the freedom to be changed by God and to live up to His expectations.

Philippians 2:3 summarizes the biblical position on expectations. "With humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself" (NASB). When we put God first, allowing Him to work in our lives and the lives of others, we can begin to expect the unexpected! ☩