



Clarifying Expectations

Beautiful Marriages

Instructions

Below is an article written by John McGee in July of 2020 on marriagehelp.org. Sit down with your spouse and read through this article together. Then, talk through the discussion questions as a couple at the end of the article.

Expectations are your beliefs about the way things will be or should be. And while you may not always realize it, every one of us has expectations about nearly everything in life. Your individual story, family of origin, and past experiences all weigh in on how you expect scenarios to play out. When these expectations are unmet, life can start to feel off. The result? We often lash out at those who are not meeting our expectations. This is especially the case in marriage.

You only need to be married a few days before you realize that your spouse's expectations differ drastically from your own. These expectations can be about simple things, like who does the dishes or how you decide on dinner. Alternatively, they can be about some of life's biggest choices: When are you having kids? How should you parent? What does intimacy look like? How should you handle finances? How and when will you communicate your feelings?

Discussing expectations is difficult no matter how long you have been married, but if left unaddressed and undiscussed, the disappointment you feel as a result of these unmet desires can grow into apathy, bitterness, and anger. Proverbs 13:12 tells us "that Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life."

Navigating expectations is incredibly important to your marriage. Here are three categories of expectations to watch out for and best handle.

Three Problems with Expectations and How to Solve Them

1. You're Unaware of Your Expectations

Have you ever grown angry or frustrated at your spouse and been unable to articulate why? Chances are you had an expectation about something you were not even aware you had. Sometimes you don't realize you have expectations about how your spouse shows affection, helps around the house, or spends money until they do something in a way that you realize you don't like.

So, what can you do? Simply, Be aware of your expectations. The next time you find yourself disappointed or angry with your spouse, ask yourself, "Did I have an expectation here that wasn't met?" Often times we think we have an issue with our spouse when in reality, we simply had an expectation we weren't really aware of.

2. Your Expectations are Unreasonable

Once you're aware of your expectations, the next step is to ask if your expectations are realistic. Often in a way you don't realize, you have woven a series of expectations from social media, movies, and the incomplete information we have from the relationships of friends and family. If we are unthoughtful, we can create some unattainable expectations for our spouse.

Women can create a picture in their mind of the ideal husband who always wants to talk, is a hopeless romantic, and has great abs. Men will create a picture of a woman who always wants to have fun, is always in the mood for intimacy, and who doesn't spend much money. None of these characteristics are bad to hope for, but to expect one person to embody the best parts of everyone you know is simply unrealistic.

The solution? Be reasonable with your expectations. Ask yourself, "Is what I am expecting even possible from another human?" Like you, your spouse is an imperfect sinner in need of grace. Before you voice your frustration over an unmet expectation, slow down and ask yourself if the expectations are reasonable to expect from another human. When you realize some may be unreasonable, it makes it easier to let them go.

3. Your Expectations are Unspoken

Your spouse cannot read your mind. Even if you are aware of your expectations and they are reasonable, if you fail to voice them, your spouse has no hope to meet them. We tend to hold others responsible for expectations, even if those expectations were never communicated clearly.

The answer to this problem is simply to communicate your expectations. If the expectation is reasonable ask yourself, "Have I shared this with my spouse?" We often get angry with our spouse thinking they are not doing something out of spite. While that may be true, it could also be that you have never let them know your desires and preferences. God reads minds, but spouses don't. Make sure you are aware of your expectations, that they are realistic, and that you have taken the time to share them with your spouse.

A marriage is made up of two very different people who will have two very different sets of expectations. Navigating them will be a constant challenge for any couple. If they are handled well, they can be a great way to way to get closer.

Our hope isn't in our spouse meeting our expectations. When they do, it is great. When they don't, our life isn't somehow over. Regardless of when your spouse does or doesn't meet your desires and expectations, you have a relationship with the living God who is the true source of life. (Psalm 73:25-26)

Discussion Questions:

1. Share about a time when you realized that you had an expectation of your spouse that was not communicated. How did that impact your relationship?
2. Take a minute and reflect on whether you have any expectations of your spouse that are unrealistic. If so, how can you bring your expectations down to a realistic level?
3. With humility and a willingness to listen, ask your spouse if there are any expectations you have of them that they feel are unrealistic.
4. Reflect and think about any expectations you have of your spouse that you have not communicated. Are they realistic? If so, share those expectations with your spouse.