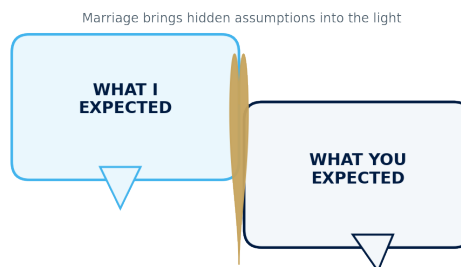


EXPECTATIONS

IN MARRIAGE

Learning to Love the Person You Actually Married

A biblical guide to identifying hidden assumptions, holding preferences with open hands, and growing in covenant love.



“Strong marriages are built as two people bring expectations into the light and learn to love with patience, humility, and covenant faithfulness.”

Every couple enters marriage with expectations. Engaged couples already have ideas about what marriage will be like. Newly married couples quickly discover that some ideas were accurate and others were not. Even couples married for years can uncover expectations they have never clearly expressed.

EXPECTATIONS SHOW UP AT MORE THAN ONE LEVEL

PRACTICAL EXPECTATIONS	DEEPER EXPECTATIONS
• Who will pay the bills? • How clean should the house be? • How will we divide responsibilities? • How often will we see our families? • What role will church have in our week?	• “Know when something is wrong.” • “Make me feel important.” • “Want as much affection as I do.” • “Reassure me when I feel insecure.” • “Make me feel less lonely.”

Expectations are not necessarily wrong. Many are good and reasonable. The problem comes when they remain unspoken, become unrealistic, or quietly turn into demands.

01 Unspoken Expectations Become Invisible Rules

You grew up in a particular home. Your spouse grew up in another. Family rhythms, approaches to conflict, attitudes toward money, household standards, and ways of showing affection all shape what feels “normal.” Neither spouse may realize how deeply those patterns have formed expectations.

Then marriage begins. One spouse thinks, “Of course we should spend Sunday afternoon with family.” The other thinks, “I assumed Sunday afternoon would be our time together.” One expects a carefully organized home; the other is comfortable with some clutter. One wants long conversations at the end of the day; the other comes home mentally exhausted and needs quiet.

The difference itself may not be sinful. Trouble begins when a preference becomes an invisible rule: “This is what a good husband does.” “This is what a loving wife would know.” “If you really cared about me, you would want what I want.”

QUESTIONS TO ASK EACH OTHER

- What did you assume marriage would be like?
- Where did those expectations come from?
- Which expectations do we share?
- Where are we different?
- Which expectations have we never really discussed?

“The goal is not perfect agreement. The goal is understanding.”

02 Your Spouse Cannot Carry the Weight of Your Heart

Marriage is a wonderful gift from God. Companionship, affection, friendship, sexual intimacy, shared experiences, and emotional closeness are all good gifts.

“Your spouse cannot bear the weight of being your savior.”

If you expect marriage to remove your loneliness, secure your identity, heal every wound, keep you happy, and continually make you feel valuable, you are asking another human being to do something only God can do.

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|---|---|
| • Your spouse will have bad days. | • Your spouse will need encouragement when you hoped to receive it. |
| • Your spouse will misunderstand you. | • Your spouse will fail you. |
| • Your spouse may be tired when you want attention. | • And you will fail your spouse. |

That does not necessarily mean something is wrong with your marriage. It means you married a human being. A healthy marriage is not two empty people demanding that the other fill them. It is two people learning to find their deepest hope and satisfaction in Christ and then loving one another out of the grace they have received from Him.

A REVEALING HEART QUESTION

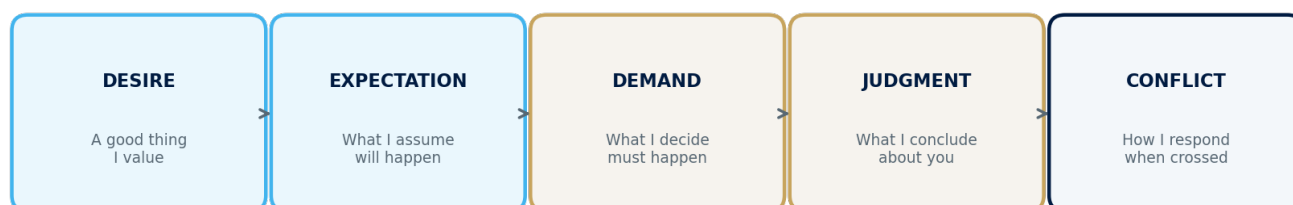
“What happens inside me when I do not get what I want?”

ANGRY	WITHDRAW	SILENT	ANXIOUS
LECTURE	MANIPULATE	ASSUME THE WORST	

Disappointment is inevitable in marriage. The deeper question is what you do with your disappointment.

03 When a Desire Becomes a Demand

James 4 connects conflict with desires that are battling within us. A good desire can begin to control us when we decide that we must have it. The issue is not merely what we want, but what happens when the desire becomes a requirement we place on our spouse.



Pause, communicate, and submit the expectation to Scripture before desire hardens into demand.

DESIRE VERSUS DEMAND

A DESIRE	A DEMAND
<i>"I would really value more time together."</i>	<i>"If you loved me, you would spend every free evening with me."</i>
<i>"I value an orderly home."</i>	<i>"If the house is messy, you are failing me."</i>
<i>"I hope we can eventually afford vacations."</i>	<i>"If you cannot provide the lifestyle I expected, I will resent you."</i>

The first statements express desires. The second turn those desires into demands and judgments. Words such as must, always, never, and should can sometimes reveal that a personal preference has quietly become law.

QUESTIONS TO ASK EACH OTHER

- What did I want?
- Was my desire reasonable?
- Did I communicate it clearly?
- Have I turned a preference into a demand?
- Am I judging my spouse for not meeting an expectation we never clearly discussed?

Some things are biblical convictions and should not be surrendered. Faithfulness to Christ matters. Honesty matters. Sexual purity matters. But many everyday expectations — where to live, travel, traditions, household standards, evenings, extended family — require humility, patience, and compromise rather than proving that your preferred way is the only right way.

04 Learn to Love the Real Person

First Corinthians 13 describes love as patient and kind. Love does not insist on its own way. Those words become very practical in marriage.

PATIENCE	KINDNESS	OPEN-HANDED LOVE
Love when your spouse is moving more slowly than you would like.	Choose a gracious tone when you are disappointed.	Your preference does not automatically become your spouse's obligation.

“How can I seek the good of the person God has given me?”

Marriage can easily become transactional: “I’ll be affectionate if you’re affectionate.” “I’ll respect you when you make me feel loved.” “I’ll help around the house if you appreciate me.” “I’ll listen when you start listening to me.” That is less like Christlike love and more like a trade.

Philippians 2:4 calls believers to consider not only their own interests but the interests of others. Ephesians 5 points husbands especially to Christ’s sacrificial love for His church. Biblical love moves toward the other person for his or her good. That does not mean ignoring sin, remaining silent when something is wrong, or never expressing hurt. Love tells the truth, can confront, and can ask for change — but even correction should seek the other person’s good rather than revenge, control, or victory.

05 Stop Loving an Imaginary Spouse

Sometimes our greatest frustration comes because we compare the person we married with the person we imagined. Perhaps you pictured someone who wanted long conversations every night, but your spouse needs more time to process. Perhaps you imagined a highly organized home, but your spouse is naturally less structured. Perhaps you expected someone who always wanted to socialize, but your spouse becomes exhausted after a long evening with people.

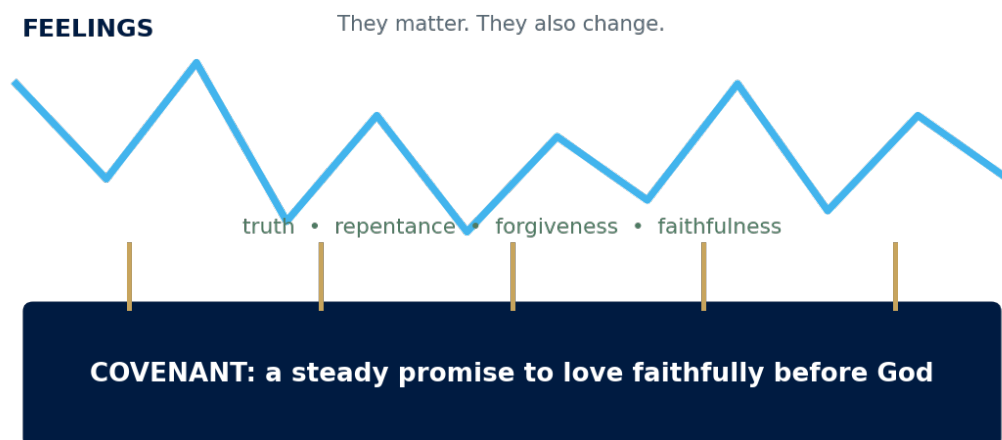
Love does not require pretending those differences do not exist. It does require learning the person in front of you.

“How can I wisely love the person God has actually given me?”

Marriage is not designed to erase personality differences. It gives us countless opportunities to grow in Christlike love through those differences.

06 Covenant Is Stronger Than Changing Feelings

Feelings matter. Romantic affection, attraction, and excitement about marriage are good gifts. But feelings change. Marriage eventually includes ordinary Tuesdays, long workdays, unexpected bills, sickness, fatigue, family pressures, crying children, aging parents, and seasons when one or both spouses feel emotionally drained.



“My feelings matter, but they are not my master. I have promised before God to love you faithfully.”

We do not wait until we feel patient to practice patience. We do not wait until we feel forgiving to begin moving toward forgiveness. We do not wait until generosity feels natural before learning to give. In the same way, covenant love continues to move toward the other person even when emotions fluctuate.

Covenant is never permission for abuse, coercion, or serious unrepentant sin. In the normal difficulties of marriage, though, covenant gives a husband and wife solid ground beneath their feet: “We belong to God. We have promised faithfulness. We are going to keep seeking Him, keep telling the truth, keep repenting, keep forgiving, and keep learning how to love.”

COVENANT LOVE IN PRACTICE

PATIENCE	FORGIVENESS	GENEROSITY	FAITHFULNESS
Practice it before you feel it.	Move toward it rather than waiting.	Give before it feels natural.	Keep the promise when emotions fluctuate.

07 Talk About Your Expectations

A helpful conversation can begin with something very simple. Each of you can identify several expectations you have about marriage and then discuss them together. Talk about practical areas such as finances, family, responsibilities, affection, church, children, free time, holidays, household standards, technology, and recreation.

A SIMPLE EXPECTATIONS AUDIT

QUESTION 1	Is this realistic?
QUESTION 2	Is this fair?
QUESTION 3	Is this biblical?
QUESTION 4	What will happen in my heart if this expectation is not met?
<i>The final question may be the most revealing of all.</i>	

The purpose is not to eliminate expectations. It is to make them visible so they can be discussed wisely. You do not need a spouse who perfectly matches every expectation. You need to keep learning one another.

You will both disappoint each other. You will both need grace. You will both discover expectations you did not realize you had. Those discoveries do not have to pull you apart. They can become opportunities to communicate more clearly, examine your own heart, become more flexible, and grow in Christlike love.

A strong marriage is not built by two people who always get what they expected.

It is built by two people who are learning to love faithfully when life is different from what they expected.

Key Scripture references: James 4 • 1 Corinthians 13 • Philippians 2:4 • Ephesians 5