

EXPECTATIONS, LOVE & COMMITMENT

A Guide for Engaged Couples • Session Three

KEY IDEA

Strong marriages are built on Christlike love and covenant commitment, not on unspoken expectations or changing feelings.

Every couple enters marriage carrying expectations — some spoken, many never said out loud. Some are practical: who pays the bills, how clean the house should be, how often you'll see each family. Others are emotional and harder to name:

"I expect you to know when I'm upset without my having to explain it."

"I expect marriage to make me feel less lonely."

"I expect you to make me feel important."

Unspoken expectations are dangerous because they quietly become invisible rules. One of you assumes, "Of course a spouse should do this." The other has never even considered it. Neither of you realizes there is a difference until disappointment shows up.

As you talk through the Questionnaire on Expectations together, ask each other: Where were we similar? Where were we different? What did this reveal about me?

1 Examine Your Expectations

A. Your Spouse Is Not Your Savior

*Your spouse is not your savior.
There is only one Jesus.*

Marriage is a tremendous gift — companionship, affection, intimacy, shared life. But no human relationship can bear the weight of ultimate hope. If you expect your future spouse to remove your loneliness, secure your identity, heal every wound, and make you feel valuable every day, you are asking them to do what only God can do.

Your spouse will have bad days. They will misunderstand you, grow tired, and sometimes fail you. That isn't proof

the marriage is broken — it's proof you married a human being.

So ask yourselves honestly: What happens inside me when I don't get what I want? Do I become angry, withdraw, go silent, assume the worst? Disappointment is unavoidable in marriage. The real question is what you'll do with it.

Watch for language that turns a desire into a demand. "I would love quality time" is a desire. "If you loved me, you'd spend every evening with me" is a demand. Words like must, always, never, and should can reveal where a preference has quietly become a law you expect your spouse to obey.

B. Make Expectations Realistic and Flexible

Picture an ordinary Tuesday three years from now. Not the honeymoon — just a normal day. The alarm goes off, someone didn't sleep well, the kitchen is a mess, someone is discouraged. What do you expect from each other on that day? Who notices what needs to be done? What does affection look like when you're both tired?

Covenant love is proved not only in dramatic sacrifice but in thousands of small acts of faithfulness.

A mature expectation sounds like, "This matters to me, and I want to talk about it — but I'm willing to listen, adjust, and serve." An immature one sounds like, "This is how it has to be, and if you loved me you'd agree."

Some convictions are not negotiable — faithfulness to Christ, sexual purity, honesty. But many daily expectations (where you live, how clean is clean enough, how often you travel) are preferences that require humility and flexibility from both of you.

2 Understand Biblical Love

A. Let Scripture Define Love

“Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant — 1 Corinthians 13”

That passage is more than a romantic reading at weddings. It is a heart-level description of what love actually does. Love is patient — I choose patience when you are slower than I want. Love is kind — I choose kindness when I am tired or frustrated. Love does not insist on its own way — which matters enormously in marriage, because so much conflict comes down to two people each wanting their own way.

Biblical love asks a different question: How can I seek your good?

Transactional love says, “I will give if I get” — I’ll be affectionate if you’re affectionate, I’ll serve if you notice. That isn’t really the love of Christ; it’s a trade. Sacrificial love says, “Because Christ has loved me, I want to seek your good” (Ephesians 5:25). Christ didn’t love the church because it earned his love — he gave himself.

B. Become a Servant, Not Just a Guest

Think of Thanksgiving dinner. Someone spends days planning, shopping, and cooking. The guests arrive, eat in thirty minutes, and fall asleep on the couch.

The guest asks, “What is here for me?” The cook asks, “How can I provide for others?”

Marriage will expose which posture you naturally bring. Are you asking, “Will my needs be met?” or are you learning to ask, “How can I help my spouse flourish?” Both of you must learn to serve, to give, and to receive graciously — and to resist the instinct to keep score.

C. Love the Real Person in Front of You

You may have imagined marrying someone who loves deep conversation every night, or someone highly organized, or someone endlessly social. The person

you’re marrying may be quieter, less structured, or more introverted than you pictured.

Love doesn’t mean pretending those differences don’t exist. It means learning the person actually in front of you and asking how to wisely care for them — not erasing their personality, but growing together in Christlike love.

3 Embrace Covenant Commitment

A. Let Covenant Guide Changing Feelings

Feelings are a real gift — attraction, romance, the butterflies on your wedding day. But feelings change. Ten years from now, life may include sick children, long workdays, financial pressure, and seasons when you both feel emotionally drained.

Covenant gives love stability.

Commitment says, ‘My feelings matter, but they are not my master.’

You don’t wait to feel patient before practicing patience, or feel forgiving before choosing forgiveness. Faithful action often warms affection again. Covenant love keeps moving toward the other person even through changing emotions.

B. Count the Cost of the Promise

Ask each other honestly:

“What does ‘for better or for worse’ mean to me?”

“What will I do when marriage feels harder than I expected?”

“Can I remain kind while we work through conflict?”

Don’t rush past these questions. Sit with them. We love sacrificially not because we are naturally wonderful people, but because Christ first loved us. We forgive because we have been forgiven. Romans 8 reminds us that God is conforming his people to the image of his Son — and marriage will be one of the places that work happens most visibly.

C. Stay Engaged in the Work of Love

Commitment is not passive endurance — “I promised, so I guess I’ll stay miserable” is not the goal. Commitment means staying engaged: keep talking, seek help when needed, repent, forgive, pursue one another. Refuse the fantasy that a different spouse would solve the selfishness in your own heart.

Covenant is never permission to mistreat someone.

Christlike marriage calls both of you away from selfishness — the husband specifically called to love sacrificially like Christ, the wife called to respect and support, and both of you called throughout the New Testament to humility, kindness, patience, and service. Read Scripture first as a mirror for your own obedience, not a measuring stick for your spouse. The better question is always, “Where is God calling me to change?” rather than, “How can I prove you owe me what I want?”

Before Your Next Session

Write down five expectations for marriage and three specific expectations for your future spouse. Be honest, not idealistic. Then evaluate each one together:

- Is it realistic?
- Is it fair?
- Is it biblical?

Choose two practical ways to show love this week — one act of service and one act of relational care. Then talk together about where your own expectations need to change.

REMEMBER THIS

“Marriage is not about finding a perfect person who meets every expectation. It is about learning to love faithfully and grow together over time. You will both disappoint each other. You will both need grace. But Christ gives you a better foundation than changing feelings — he teaches you how to love.”

Expectations brought into the light. Love defined by Scripture. Commitment rooted in covenant, not emotion.