

Expectations in Marriage

PREMARITAL HOMEWORK

Purpose

Every person enters marriage with expectations. Some are clearly stated. Others are assumed because of family background, personality, past experiences, culture, or personal preference.

The goal of this assignment is not to agree on every detail. It is to understand one another more clearly, identify areas where expectations differ, and begin learning how to make decisions together with humility, wisdom, and love.

For each section:

1. Answer the questions separately before discussing them together.
2. Compare your answers.
3. Identify areas where you agree.
4. Identify expectations that may need further discussion.
5. Decide on one or two practical commitments where appropriate.

When you disagree, do not immediately try to convince the other person. First ask:

- Why is this important to you?
- What experiences have shaped this expectation?
- Is this a biblical conviction, a wisdom issue, or simply a preference?
- What are you afraid might happen if we handle this differently?
- What would loving compromise look like?
- What would it look like for each of us to seek the good of the other?

1. Work and Home Balance

Discuss what role work should have in your marriage and family life.

Consider:

- How many hours per week do you expect each spouse to work?
- How much work outside normal hours is reasonable?
- What boundaries should protect marriage and family time?
- How will you respond during unusually demanding work seasons?
- How much travel is acceptable?
- Should one spouse's career normally take priority?
- What would make either of you feel neglected because of work?
- What does being "present" at home look like?
- How will household responsibilities change when one person is unusually busy?
- How will you make sure one spouse does not gradually become responsible for everything at home?

Create a practical care plan

Discuss your likely weekly rhythm for:

- Work
- Meals
- Household responsibilities
- Time together
- Church
- Exercise
- Friendships
- Personal interests
- Rest
- Sleep

Write down two or three boundaries you want to protect.

NOTES & COMMITMENTS

2. Children and Family Life

Discuss your expectations about children before those decisions become immediate.

Consider:

- Do you both want children?
- How many children would you ideally like?
- When would you hope to begin having children?
- How would you respond to infertility?
- Would you consider adoption or foster care?
- What expectations do you have regarding pregnancy, childbirth, and the early years?
- Would one parent stay home with young children?
- Would both continue working?
- What forms of childcare would you be comfortable with?
- What are your expectations about discipline?
- What kind of schooling would you prefer?
- What spiritual habits would you want in your home?
- How involved should children be in sports, music, activities, and extracurricular commitments?
- How much should life revolve around children's schedules?

Discuss what kind of family culture you hope to create.

NOTES & COMMITMENTS

3. Church and Spiritual Life

Discuss what spiritual unity will look like practically.

Consider:

- How important is regular church attendance?
- What qualities would you look for in a church?
- How important are preaching style, doctrine, worship music, children's ministries, small groups, and church culture?
- How involved should your family be in church?
- What ministries would you enjoy serving in?
- How much time should ministry commitments take?
- What happens if one spouse likes a church and the other does not?
- How will you handle theological disagreements?
- What spiritual practices would you like in your home?
- Will you pray together?
- Will you read Scripture together?
- What expectations do you have regarding family devotions?
- How will you encourage rather than police one another spiritually?

Discuss what long-term faithfulness to a local church would look like for your family.

NOTES & COMMITMENTS

4. Household Roles and Organization

Discuss both responsibilities and standards.

Consider:

- Who normally cooks?
- Who cleans the kitchen?
- Who does laundry?
- Who takes out the trash?
- Who cleans bathrooms?
- Who handles yard work?
- Who handles home repairs?
- Who shops for groceries?
- Who schedules appointments?
- Who handles paperwork and administrative tasks?
- Who notices when household supplies are running low?
- Who plans meals?
- Who handles maintenance on vehicles?
- Who organizes family schedules?

Then discuss standards:

- How clean should the house normally be?
- How quickly should dishes be washed?
- How much clutter is acceptable?
- How often should cleaning happen?
- What happens during unusually busy weeks?
- What areas matter most to each of you?

Be careful not to assume that your family's way of doing something is the "normal" or "right" way.

Discuss whether you expect traditional roles, shared roles, or a combination, and what biblical principles should guide those decisions.

NOTES & COMMITMENTS

5. Finances

Discuss what financial unity will mean in practice.

Consider:

- Will all income be viewed as "our money"?
- Will you use joint accounts, separate accounts, or some combination?
- Who will manage the budget?
- Who will pay bills?
- How often will you review finances together?
- How much can either spouse spend without discussing it first?
- What amount would require a conversation before purchasing?
- How much should you save?
- How important is having an emergency fund?
- What are your expectations regarding retirement savings?
- What debt do you currently have?
- How aggressively should debt be paid off?
- How do you feel about credit cards?
- How much should you give to church and ministries?
- How will you handle bonuses, gifts, tax refunds, or unexpected money?
- How much financial help should you give parents, siblings, or friends?

Complete this sentence separately:

"Financial unity in marriage means..."

Compare your answers.

NOTES & COMMITMENTS

6. Location and Lifestyle

Discuss where and how you hope to live.

Consider:

- City, suburb, small town, or rural?
- Close to family or farther away?
- How important is living near a particular church?
- How important is proximity to work?
- Would you relocate for a job?
- Would you move to another state?
- Would you consider living overseas?
- Would you prefer renting or owning?
- How large of a home do you expect eventually?
- How important are neighborhood, schools, yard space, commute, and cost of living?

Discuss what "home" should feel like.

NOTES & COMMITMENTS

7. Vacations, Recreation, and Rest

People often define rest very differently.

Discuss:

- What does an enjoyable vacation look like to you?
- Do you prefer relaxing or sightseeing?
- Beach, mountains, cities, cruises, camping, resorts, or staying home?
- How much structure do you like on vacation?
- How often should you travel?
- How much money should normally be spent on vacations?
- How important are weekend getaways?
- How much individual recreation should each spouse have?
- What hobbies would you like to continue after marriage?
- What hobbies would you enjoy doing together?

Design a vacation that would genuinely serve both of you.

NOTES & COMMITMENTS

8. Extended Family

Marriage joins two families, and expectations can differ significantly.

Discuss:

- How often do you expect to see parents?
- How will holidays be divided?
- Where will Thanksgiving and Christmas normally be spent?
- How much access should grandparents have to future children?
- How much should parents know about marital decisions?
- What information about marital conflict should remain private?
- Would you allow family members to stay in your home for extended periods?
- Would you financially help parents if needed?
- How would you respond if a parent criticized your spouse?
- How will you establish appropriate boundaries while still honoring your families?

Complete this sentence:

"Once we are married, our primary human loyalty should be to..."

Discuss what that means practically.

NOTES & COMMITMENTS

9. Communication

Discuss your expectations regarding everyday communication.

Consider:

- How much conversation do you need each day to feel connected?
- Do you process problems immediately or need time first?
- How should you tell your spouse when something is bothering you?
- What tone or behavior makes you shut down?
- What helps you feel heard?
- Should disagreements be resolved before going to sleep?
- Is texting an appropriate way to discuss serious issues?
- How should phones be used when you are together?
- What does good listening look like?
- What topics are especially difficult for you to discuss?

Each person should finish this statement:

"When I am upset, the most helpful thing you can do is..."

NOTES & COMMITMENTS

10. Conflict and Forgiveness

Discuss what you learned about conflict growing up.

Consider:

- Did your family argue openly or avoid conflict?
- What usually happened when someone was angry?
- Was forgiveness expressed verbally?
- Did people apologize?
- Did problems get resolved or ignored?
- What causes you to become defensive?
- Do you tend to pursue, withdraw, become quiet, argue, or try to fix things immediately?
- What would constitute unacceptable behavior during conflict?
- How should you handle raised voices?
- Should either spouse ever leave during an argument?
- How much time apart is reasonable before returning to the conversation?

Discuss what a biblical apology should sound like.

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11. Physical Affection and Sexual Intimacy

You do not need to predict every detail, but expectations should not remain entirely unspoken.

Discuss:

- How important is physical affection to each of you?
- What kinds of nonsexual affection communicate love?
- What expectations do you have regarding sexual intimacy?
- How will you talk about differences in desire?
- What fears or concerns do you have about intimacy?
- How should either spouse communicate that he or she is tired, uncomfortable, or not emotionally ready?
- How will you guard your marriage from pornography and inappropriate relationships?
- What boundaries should exist with members of the opposite sex?
- How will you respond when intimacy is affected by pregnancy, children, illness, stress, or aging?

The goal is mutual love, patience, generosity, and communication rather than entitlement.

NOTES & COMMITMENTS

12. Friendships and Social Life

Discuss how friendships will fit into married life.

Consider:

- How often do you expect to spend time with friends?
- Will you normally socialize together or separately?
- How much individual time with friends is healthy?
- What boundaries should exist with opposite-sex friendships?
- Are there friendships either of you believes may need to change after marriage?
- How frequently would you like to host people in your home?
- Are you energized by having people over or drained by it?
- How much privacy do you want as a couple?

Discuss what a healthy balance between community and privacy looks like.

NOTES & COMMITMENTS

13. Phones, Technology, Entertainment, and Social Media

Discuss habits before they become sources of frustration.

Consider:

- Are phones allowed during meals?
- Will phones stay in the bedroom overnight?
- How much gaming, television, or streaming is reasonable?
- What kinds of entertainment should your family avoid?
- How much time on social media feels healthy?
- Should spouses know one another's passwords?
- What expectations do you have regarding privacy?
- What boundaries should exist regarding texting or messaging members of the opposite sex?
- Should marital disagreements ever be discussed publicly or on social media?

Agree on several basic technology boundaries.

NOTES & COMMITMENTS

14. Health, Exercise, and Personal Care

Consider:

- How important are exercise and physical fitness?
- What expectations do you have regarding diet?
- How much money should be spent on fitness, hobbies, or personal care?
- How should spouses talk about weight or appearance?
- How will you respond if one spouse develops chronic health problems?
- What responsibility does each person have to care for his or her health?
- How will you support rather than control one another?

NOTES & COMMITMENTS

15. Personal Time and Independence

Marriage creates profound unity without eliminating individuality.

Discuss:

- How much alone time does each of you need?
- How much time do you expect to spend together each evening?
- Are separate hobbies healthy?
- Are separate trips with friends appropriate?
- How much independence should spouses have when making plans?
- When should you consult one another before committing to something?

Complete this sentence:

"I feel loved when you give me freedom to..."

NOTES & COMMITMENTS

16. Decision-Making and Leadership

Discuss how decisions will be made.

Consider:

- What decisions should always be discussed together?
- What decisions can normally be made independently?
- What happens when you disagree?
- What does biblical leadership look like?
- What does biblical submission look like?
- How can a husband lead without becoming controlling?
- How can a wife express disagreement while still respecting her husband?
- How should both spouses seek wisdom?
- When might counsel from pastors or mature believers be helpful?

Discuss the difference between leadership and getting your way.

NOTES & COMMITMENTS

17. Career, Education, and Future Goals

Look farther into the future.

Discuss:

- What career goals does each person have?
- Would either of you pursue additional education?
- How much time and money should further education require?
- Would either spouse change careers?
- How much should earning potential influence career decisions?
- Would you accept a demanding promotion?
- What sacrifices would you willingly make for the other person's goals?

Describe where you imagine your family ten years from now.

NOTES & COMMITMENTS

18. Hospitality and Use of Your Home

Discuss:

- How often would you like guests in your home?
- How spontaneous can invitations be?
- Should either spouse check before inviting people over?
- Are overnight guests welcome?
- How much preparation is necessary before guests arrive?
- Do you want your home regularly used for ministry?
- How much privacy and quiet does each spouse need?

NOTES & COMMITMENTS

19. Traditions, Holidays, and Family Culture

Discuss what traditions you hope to establish.

Consider:

- Birthdays
- Christmas
- Thanksgiving
- Anniversaries
- Family meals
- Sunday routines
- Vacations
- Family devotions
- Holiday spending
- Gift giving
- Visiting relatives

Which traditions from your childhood would you like to continue?

Which would you rather leave behind?

What new traditions would you like to create?

NOTES & COMMITMENTS

20. Crisis, Suffering, and Unexpected Changes

Marriage rarely unfolds exactly as planned.

Discuss how you imagine responding to:

- Job loss
- Infertility
- Miscarriage
- Serious illness
- Financial setbacks
- Caring for aging parents
- A child with special needs
- Moving unexpectedly
- Extended unemployment
- Major disappointment
- A season when one spouse cannot contribute as much as usual

Ask one another:

"When life becomes very difficult, what kind of support would you most need from me?"

NOTES & COMMITMENTS

Final Exercise: Our Ten Most Important Expectations

After discussing all the sections, separately write down the **ten expectations you believe are most important to your future marriage**.

Then compare your lists.

For each expectation, identify it as:

- **Biblical conviction** - Scripture clearly directs us.
- **Wisdom judgment** - We must prayerfully decide what is wisest for our circumstances.
- **Personal preference** - This matters to me, but I should hold it loosely.

Finally, identify:

Three areas where we are strongly aligned

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Three areas that need more discussion

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

One expectation I need to hold more loosely

One way I can better serve my future spouse

One concern or question we want to bring to our next counseling session

A Final Question

Before finishing, ask each other:

"Is there an expectation you have about marriage that you are afraid to tell me because you think I might disagree?"

Listen carefully before responding.

The goal isn't to enter marriage with every future decision settled. The goal is to develop the kind of honesty, humility, trust, and biblical love that will allow you to face those decisions together.