

Crisis Management *Expectations*

I. Reality of Expectations

This morning in our series: *Crisis Management*, the topic is expectations. I am going to talk about the negative aspect of expectations. There is a positive side in having expectations of others and ourselves. But I think it is the negative side that usually affects us adversely.

We all have expectations – often based upon assumptions that we make. So often we make leaps of logic – expectations – because of our assumptions. Paul Harvey wrote about Speedy Morris – at that time the basketball coach for La Salle University. Morris was shaving when his wife called out to tell him he was wanted on the phone by *Sports Illustrated*.

He was so excited by the prospect of national recognition that he nicked himself with his razor and ran – with a mixture of blood and lather on his face – and fell down the steps. But he got to the phone.

And the voice on the other end said: “For just seventy five cents an issue you can get a one-year trial subscription....”

- **We have expectations of others.** We expect that if we treat people nice, they will do the same. We expect that if we can just get married, we will be happy. We expect our husband or wife to feel, act and say just what and how we do and would. We expect our spouse to know what we are thinking or how we are feeling. We expect them to read our mind and know what we want. We expect our co-workers to appreciate us, our bosses to value our work. We expect athletes to behave like grown-ups. Our lives are filled with expectations of other people.

- **We have expectations of our children.** We all want our children to be socially adjusted, happy, brilliant – Rhodes scholars, star athletes, Miss American queen, witty, potential Pulitzer Prize winning authors, etc. On the flip side, kids: you have expectations of mom and dad – you expect them to know what you are going through at this stage of life. After all, they were young once – or at least you think so!

- **We have expectations of ourselves.** We expect to live healthy lives, free of sickness, until dying in our sleep at the ripe old age of 101. We expect that if we are good, life should be good.
- **We have expectations of God** – of how we think God should treat us or help us. “Surely God is going to act in this way or that.” We think that our relationship with God is *quid pro quo*: “If I do this for God, God must do this for me.”

Do you remember Jonah – in the Old Testament? God called him to go to the brutal, pagan city of Nineveh. He was to preach a message of God’s judgment against the people. Jonah ran away, and you remember the story: a huge storm threatened to destroy the ship he was on so the sailors threw him overboard.

God sent a great fish to swallow Jonah, preserving his life. Jonah repented of his disobedience, the whale barfed him up, and he went to Nineveh as commanded. He preached God’s message and the people repented.

But Jonah had expectations of God. Surely, God would yet destroy Nineveh; that’s what Jonah would do if he were God. Here’s the story according to Veggie Tales.

Veggie Tales

Jonah was in a crisis because of expectations.

What is the impact of expectations? What effects do we see in our lives? Let’s look at this in two areas: unrealistic expectations and unmet expectations.

II. Impact of Expectations

- **Unrealistic expectations.** We need to take a hard look at our expectations and determine if they are even realistic. Let’s take our children, for example. We believe that if we can just get them into the best pre-school, then into the best academic or athletic school, if we can get them into every activity possible – sports, clubs, student government, etc. – then they will get into the best university – then they will graduate and get the best job – the highest paying job – and then...they will be happy, fulfilled, well-adjusted, responsible. Does this sound remotely familiar?

Our expectation is that if we just get that promotion, that new position, that new car, that bigger house, that new wife or husband, then...we will be happy, fulfilled, contented. If we just work harder, longer hours, take on more responsibility...

How about our relationship with God? Let me share some thoughts that I think are relevant to many of us. We have in our mind the view of the perfect Christian – what I would call the phantom Christian. We expect that this is what we should be like if we were really spiritual. What characterizes this person?

- they spend at least one hour every day in personal devotions
- they keep a detailed list of every prayer request – pages of them, and most of them have an answer by them – an answer that is always just what they asked for
- they journal every day, writing about the exciting walk with God they experienced that day
- they have family devotions every night after spending a wonderful hour around the dinner table sharing with each other the highlights of their day
- they share Christ with every person they are with for more than five minutes
- they never get frustrated when things don't go their way
- they never get angry, upset – are always patient, kind, forgiving

This describes the phantom Christian – perfection. It describes who you should be, doesn't it? After all, that's probably how everyone else here at Knollwood lives. – NOT!

What happens when we face unrealistic expectations? We try harder; we push harder. We conclude that there must be something wrong with the system, something wrong with my children, something wrong with God, something wrong with myself.

▪ **Unmet expectations.** Because many of our expectations are unrealistic, we find many of them are unmet. And we face disappointment. Let me try to define disappointment for you.

Disappointment is the difference between expectations, assumptions or anticipations and reality.

We are disappointed in others, in our children, in God, in ourselves. Disappointment over unmet expectations produces emotional, psychological and spiritual consequences and effects in our lives.

I want you to think of some of the effects of disappointment. Maybe it's something you have experienced or, if that is too personal, something you have observed in others:-)

While you think, I'll start with this one: whining about our lot in life. Brother Paul joined a monastery where a vow of silence was required. Every ten years they were allowed to speak, but then only two words. At the end of ten years, it was Paul's first chance to speak. He said: "Bed hard." Ten years later, his next opportunity: "Food stinks." Another ten years go by and it's time for Paul's comment: "I quit." The abbot said, "I'm not surprised. All you've done since you've been here is complain!"

What are some other responses/consequences of disappointment because of unmet expectations?

- 1) **Anger** – when things don't go the way we expect them to, when people don't act like we assume they should, when we don't see the results we expect to see, we often respond in anger. "Life isn't fair. How come this or that didn't happen?"
- 2) **Sadness** – sometime we feel profoundly sad when things don't go as we want them to. We might be tempted to just give up – "what's the use of trying? I was hurt and disappointed in a relationship – I'm not going to let that happen again."
- 3) **Anxiety** – we get anxious; we worry; we fret.
- 4) **Jealousy** – sometimes we are jealous. We see that other family; they look happy; their kids look successful. Why can't my kids be like that? Why can't our family be like that? Why can't I be like that?
- 5) **Covetousness** – not only do we get jealous, we want – we covet – what others have. The grass always seems greener on the other side of the fence – and we want it!

Unmet expectations – disappointment. Every time we encounter disappointment, we come to a crossroads. How will we handle the disappointment? How will we manage expectations? I suggest we need a reality check. Let me suggest three things.

III. Reality Check

A. Accept Reality

We need to remember that we are fallen people living in a fallen world. There is no perfection in this life; there will be no perfection on this side of eternity. This isn't a pessimistic world-view; it is a Biblical world-view. It is a spiritual reality.

Sometimes I find myself angry at the disregard of human life, of evil people who do evil things in the world. People who have no regard for truth or for decency. And then I catch myself: Why should I be surprised. Why should I expect people without God to act godly?

We also need to accept the reality about ourselves. One of those clichés out there is this: "You can do anything you set your mind to and work to achieve." Really? What if you are just not gifted, skilled or talented enough to do that? What if you don't have the mental aptitude necessary? What if you don't have the temperament or personality required?

Years ago I heard a speaker make this statement that I have shared many times:

Accept the limits of your limitations and the responsibility of your abilities.

Listen, this isn't an excuse to sit and do nothing! Remember the parable of the talents in the Gospels. Jesus told about the master leaving on a journey and entrusting his resources to his servants. All went out and invested their talents and saw increased returns - all except one who dug a hole in the ground and buried his in fear that he might lose it and then face the wrath of his master. But the master repudiated this servant for not investing his talent.

This is not an excuse to not try – to not apply oneself. It isn't an excuse to not seek to improve yourself and your situation – to try and live how God wants you to live. It just means to accept certain realities about yourself and about others.

Francis of Assisi put it this way:

Lord grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.

Now, you know I like Calvin and Hobbes – the little boy Calvin and Hobbes, his imaginary tiger friend. This might be more to our speed than Francis of Assisi. In

one comic strip Calvin poses this question to Hobbes: “Know what I pray for?” Hobbes responds, “What?”

Calvin: “The strength to change what I can, the inability to accept what I can’t, and the incapacity to know the difference.”

Hobbes says, “You should lead an interesting life.” Calvin replies: “Oh, I already do!”

B. Give Grace

Cut some slack with your friends, your children, your co-workers, your spouse, yourself. Remember, perfection doesn’t exist for them either. We, of all people who have experienced the grace of God in our lives, should be quick to give grace.

This doesn’t mean we don’t hold people to their word, that we don’t have standards – even high standards. It doesn’t mean we should have no expectations of others. But temper these expectations with reality and be quick to dispense grace.

C. Hope in God

Our hope should not be in worldly possessions. They produce a false sense of security and hope.

Our hope should not be in our accomplishments. Records fall by the wayside, surpassed by others. Our accomplishments recede in memory as time passes.

Our hope should not be in other people. People disappoint; they don’t live up to our expectations; they fail to be what we want them to be or do what we want them to do. We look for affirmation from them only to be disappointed. We look for perfection in them, only to be disappointed in them. We look to them to fulfill us, to meet our needs, only to be disappointed that they can’t and don’t.

Neither should our hope be in ourselves. We are disappointed with ourselves – that ever true of you? How many times have you been angry with yourself because you didn’t perform as you thought and expected you should? You didn’t achieve what you expected to achieve and assumed you would achieve in life?

We see this all the time during the middle point in people's lives as they take stock and do a review and discover they haven't accomplished what they had hoped to; they realize they are on the downhill portion of their lives and fear the rest of it will be just the same as the first part. Mid-life adjustment becomes mid-life crisis.

Three common responses to disappointment and misplaced hope:

- Pity party – We engage in the great indoor sport of self-pity. “Woe is me!”
- Blame game – who can I blame for my misfortunes, my disappointments?
- Victim mentality – I'm just a victim: events, circumstances, and people all conspire against me.

Place your hope in God – in his love and grace. Find your true satisfaction in his goodness and his work in your life.

We can have hope in the midst of disappointments, when our expectations fail us, because we know that God is working in our lives – often in unseen ways – to transform our lives to his. Henri Nouwen writes:

Our lives are full of brokenness – broken relationships, broken promises, broken expectations. How can we live with that brokenness without becoming bitter and resentful except by returning again and again to God's faithful presence in our lives.

God may use the disappointments in your life to accomplish what he cannot through your success or achievements. God may use your disappointments to close one door as he opens another. He might use them to wean you from seeking your fulfillment and meaning in things or people or circumstances – all things which produce a shallow and temporal satisfaction and fulfillment.

Would you turn in your Bible to the **Gospel of Luke, chapter 24** (Pg. 1125)? Two disciples of Jesus are facing the emotional devastation of dashed expectations. They had hoped that Jesus, as Messiah, would establish his kingdom on earth, throwing off the rule of the Romans over the Jews.

Days before, they had seen the jubilant response of the crowds who were in Jerusalem for the Passover. They cheered Jesus, shouting “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!” Oh boy, were things going to be different now!

Then Jesus was arrested, tried and executed. All their expectations were dashed, destroyed in a moment. What now?

Let's look at the account – **Luke 24:13-35**

As we deal with expectations, we need to ask Jesus to open our eyes. Help us to see the reality of who he is and how he wants us to see ourselves, others, and the world around us. This is how we successfully manage expectations.