

Have you ever been let down because you had high expectations?

If you're like most of us here, you have probably become disappointed because of expectations at some point in your life. Whether it was that person who you thought would be so overwhelmingly special and didn't turn out to be, or the trip that was supposed to be a "trip of a lifetime" that ended up being just another location, we all conceive our own portrait of what the future might be.

Maybe you had high expectations for your career, or maybe you had high expectations for your children, or maybe you just had high expectations for a movie, whatever it is, sometimes it may appear that life has let us down. Worse still, sometimes you may even feel that God has let you down.

So what is it that makes us have high expectations anyway? Is it because we want so badly to believe that something will radically change our lives? Or is it because we need to identify with something greater than ourselves? I can not answer why you have had high expectations for something and it did not turn out the way you wanted too; but using myself as an example, there are many things that I had high expectations for.

Three years ago, I had high expectations of my future scholastic adventure at Yale. I thought it was going to be great. I could learn more about the Bible and be surrounded by intellectual people of faith. I was severely disappointed because their view of the Bible was not my view. In addition, their belief system was overrun by their intellect instead of just being guided by it. So I set myself up for disappointment because I put my stock in what I thought other people would be like.

Even further back in high school I had high expectations of my football achievements. These achievements were not on the field, but came from notoriety off the field. Again, I put my stock in others. I had hoped that they would be able to satisfy what I needed to feel important and special, but just like at Yale, I was disappointed.

Conversely, we all know and hear that our wedding day is supposed to be the “biggest day of our lives.” In actuality, I had no real expectations for my wedding day because I knew that I was marrying the person I wanted to be with. Everything was planned down to the last detail. And yes, not everything went to plan...again because some of it was out of our control and depended on others, but my wedding day did not disappoint.

**So what is the difference between those things that don't live up to their expectations and those that do? The difference...is all about you!** If you set yourself up for disappointment either because you relied too heavily on others, or because you were too vague in what you really wanted, or because you senselessly put that thing up on a pedestal, then you will probably be disappointed.

On Tuesday Shawna and I will be leaving for the Holy Land. And by all measure one could say it is "The Trip of a Lifetime." But what makes it that way? Is it because we are going to a far away land and are going to be immersed into different cultures and peoples? Is it because we are staying at hotels and will be somewhat catered to throughout the trip? Is it because we are viewing history? While all of these things may be true, I must tell you I have no expectations for this trip. What I think will happen is that I may be transformed spiritually into a deeper appreciation of God. But this has more to do with me than it does the sites, sounds, tastes, and feeling of the place we are going. And more than that, I am very specific about what I want to happen there: I want to grow closer to God. And in this way, regardless of whether the food isn't any good, the hotels have bugs crawling in them, people are rude, and the holy sites are too crowded to get good

pictures, as long as I have the right mindset before I go, everything will fulfill my expectations.

I think the same is true for anything you have expectations for, especially those things that you expect from God. Maybe you expect a healthy baby, or a great marriage, or a delicious dinner, whatever it is, those are your expectations, and may not necessarily be God's expectations. So when you want something from God, remember the scripture passages we are about to explore:

**James 1:2-7** <sup>NRS</sup> <sup>2</sup> ¶ My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy, <sup>3</sup> because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance; <sup>4</sup> and let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing. <sup>5</sup> ¶ If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given you. <sup>6</sup> But ask in faith, never doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind; <sup>7</sup> for the doubter, being double-minded and unstable in every way, must not expect to receive anything from the Lord.

In this passage that was read earlier, we can see that sometimes we endure trials despite our expectations that nothing bad will ever happen to us because we believe in God. But God helps us to endure things to make us stronger. But we have to truly believe that God will be there. We can't just think he will be and do what we want. As the passage states, we must not doubt. **Faith has no doubt.** Another way of looking at faith is the adage, "to set it and forget it." This means that you may pray for something but being redundant and praying for it over and over again means you either didn't believe God heard you the first time or that he is not doing what you want. You have to truly believe that God will do something. **You have to put your belief into action—that is faith.** This is the only way we can understand passages such as

**Romans 8:28** <sup>28</sup> ¶ We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.

We notice it does not say 'all things work together for good the way we want them to.' So when it comes to our expectations, sometimes we will be let down. But I have a feeling **if we are more specific with our desires and expectations, and we have faith that God will be there, and that no matter what it will work out for good, then how can anything ever really disappoint us?**

Furthermore, there is one unifying principle that keeps us focused on enjoying everything despite bumps in the road or things that did not turn out the way we expected. **And that unifying principle is love. Love for each other, and love from God.**

**1 John 3:16-24** <sup>16</sup> We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us-- and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. <sup>17</sup> How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help? <sup>18</sup> Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. <sup>19</sup> ¶ And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him <sup>20</sup> whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. <sup>21</sup> Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God; <sup>22</sup> and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him. <sup>23</sup> And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. <sup>24</sup> All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us.

In verse 21 we read that, “if our hearts do not condemn us we have boldness before God.”

παρρησίαν ἔχομεν πρὸς τὸν θεόν In other words, **boldness, assurance, or confidence** before God. So if you really do need that thing which you ask for from God, and you are not in any way conflicted about it, we do know that God will be there for us. Listen to the following passage that tells about what could happen if we are conflicted about asking something from God:

**James 4:1-8** <sup>NRS</sup> **James 4:1** ¶ Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from? Do they not come from your cravings that are at war within you? <sup>2</sup> You want something and do not have it; so you commit murder. And you covet something and cannot obtain it; so you engage in disputes and conflicts. You do not have, because you do not ask. <sup>3</sup> You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, in order to spend what you get on your pleasures. <sup>4</sup> Adulterers! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. <sup>5</sup> Or do you suppose that it is for nothing that the scripture says, "God yearns jealously for the spirit that he has made to dwell in us"? <sup>6</sup> But he gives all the more grace;

therefore it says, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble."

<sup>7</sup> Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. <sup>8</sup> Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.

So when it comes to our expectations we know that we can not be conflicted about them. We know that we must ask for something but before we do we have to be clear. **Also we must ask in love, not selfishness or envy. And even then, sometimes God will grant us what we want but it may not be what we expected!** God granted my wish to go to Yale, and it was not what I expected and it would be foolish to blame God for granting my wish.

Finally, besides all these things that we have talked about already, I think the one thing that will help us from being disappointed in our expectations and help us fulfill our expectations is being thankful for what we already have.

**Matthew 6:25-34** <sup>25</sup> ¶ "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? <sup>26</sup> Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than

they? <sup>27</sup> And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? <sup>28</sup> And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, <sup>29</sup> yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. <sup>30</sup> But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you-- you of little faith? <sup>31</sup> Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' <sup>32</sup> For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. <sup>33</sup> But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. <sup>34</sup> ¶ "So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today.

**So do not worry about tomorrow and expectations you may have.**

**Enjoy life today and concentrate on its blessings; they may never return.**

Finally, there is one thing that we should all be focusing on as our greatest expectation. This expectation will surely come. And like the passage that was read earlier, we must be ready for it.

**1 Thessalonians 5:2** <sup>2</sup> For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.

Again,

**Luke 12:46** <sup>46</sup> the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour that he does not know

Another way of translating the Greek word δούλος, or slave, is “**servant.**” And since we all should strive to be servants of God, we must remember to enjoy life now because we never know when it will end. *We never know when Jesus will come back for us.* And he is our master and wants us to be at work for him.

**All we do know is right here, right now.** So we can rejoice in the blessings of today. We don’t have to worry about tomorrow. And we don’t have to be let down by our expectations anymore.

And when we really need to, we can ask for things from God with confidence and assuredness and know that He will do what is best for us and that all things will work out for good, no matter what. This is the freedom we as Christians have that others don't. We can place our faith in Christ and know God will be there for us. Whereas others, they place their faith in financial markets, institutions, and businesses and are almost always let down in the end. So place your faith in Christ and He will fulfill all your expectations. Amen.