

Great—and Not So Great—Expectations

By Dineen Miller

When I flip a light switch, I expect the light to turn on. When I turn the car key, I expect the engine to roar to life. When I take a step, I expect the ground to be there to support my foot. These are realistic, normal expectations that help define the parameters of our daily life.

But sometimes our expectations can be flat out unreasonable. Like expecting my husband to sweep me away like the hunk in the latest romance movie. Or how about expecting him to read my mind and know exactly what I want without saying a word? (Feel free to laugh out loud on that one.)

And then there are big ones like expecting him to make me happy *all* the time, which then sets me up to blame him when I'm not. Or how about fulfilling *all* my needs, especially to be loved and understood completely? And when he doesn't—I begin to question if I married the right guy, as the world calls him, my soul mate.

These are big expectations that we often carry over from false beliefs often built upon worldly definitions of what true love is and looks like. From this place of misconception, we place unrealistic expectations on our husbands to “complete us.”

As long our husband meets our needs (performs), life moves along just fine. But the minute he falls short, we become angry and disappointed. As this vicious circle continues, disappointment develops into resentment and bitterness. And our poor guys. . . they never see it coming. They roll their eyes, sprout question marks from their heads faster than the hair they're losing from the stress of it all, and either shut down or lash out.

When we cling to unrealistic expectations, disappointment is inevitable because we expect a human being—our unsuspecting husband—to fill specific needs God created and placed in us so that He can fulfill them. He uniquely designed us this way so that we would seek God as the center of our lives and not mistakenly place a thing or person in that place as an idol.

I know this to be true, because I've lived it. Nine years into my marriage I recommitted my life to Christ. I thought surely, my husband would follow close behind in my footsteps. I *expected* we would share a growing faith in God and be on the same page spiritually.

Nearly a year later he declared he was an atheist. Needless to say, I was devastated. That was not the path I'd expected he would take. I had *expected* my husband to come to faith just as I had. The sparkling glimmer of *my* expectations crashed around my feet like shattered glass. In this place of brokenness I could have easily and at times did, make my husband's salvation my focus and idol, believing this one change would solve all our

problems.

Then God picked up the pieces of my life and gave me a choice. I could stay in a place of bitterness and resentment, or I could move forward, surrendering my dream of being a “believing couple,” and trust Him to show me His unique plan for my spiritually mismatched marriage. God walked with me step-by-step in three crucial areas:

1. **Surrender your expectations.** If I found myself continually disappointed in one area, I held it before God in prayer and asked Him to either change my heart or meet this need. For example, I had expected my husband to meet my need to join me in faith, however this was a need my husband couldn't meet. But God could and still does. He fills my spiritual needs in every way. That doesn't mean I don't pray for my husband's salvation and hope for it. Actually, I expect it will come in God's timing, but not to fulfill my need. That change will be totally about my husband's need for God.

This also meant I had to stop comparing my marriage to others. Nothing brings dissatisfaction quicker than comparison. God helped me understand that my marriage wouldn't look like other marriages and that was okay.

1. **Give grace and lots of it.** Would you be surprised if I told you my husband has been one of my greatest models of forgiveness? God has used my pre-believer to show me what forgiveness looks like. I make mistakes, and I'm learning to be real about my faith. My authenticity is my greatest testimony to my husband about who I am and who I desire to be as a follower of Jesus. God also helped me understand that I can't expect my husband to live according to a belief system he doesn't share. For example, my morality is based upon God's definition of sin and Jesus' payment for my sins. My husband's morality is based upon his own personal standard of accountability and what he believes is right and wrong. The word 'sin' doesn't exist in his vocabulary or in his worldview.

1. **Let God fulfill your needs.** As I allowed God to tug those expectations out of my hands, He revealed that He was the one meant to fulfill my deepest needs. After all, He was the one who placed them within me. I learned to trust God to satisfy my need to be loved and understood deeply, especially on a spiritual level. I also began to understand that God designed me for His purpose—a purpose that would satisfy and make me happy independent of anything, and anyone around me. Whether my husband is a believer or not.

Since I've let go of unrealistic expectations, our marriage has become a place of freedom to love unconditionally—for both of us. Our life together is more enjoyable and peaceful and our marriage continues to flourish and thrive. The friendship that started our relationship has returned and continues to grow.

Now I'm free to love my husband just as he is. Just like Jesus loves us. And leave the rest

in God's most capable hands.

Author Bio:

Dineen Miller believes her years as a youth counselor, a Stephen Minister, a women's ministry leader and a small group leader fuel her desire to ignite the souls of others through words of truth. She's also a C.L.A.S.S. Communicator and has been featured on the Moody Radio Network, Focus on the Family, Dr. James Dobson's FamilyTalk and FamilyLife Today. She lives in the Bay Area with her husband, and they are the proud parents of two daughters and a son-in-law. Dineen is the coauthor of the award winning book, *Winning Him Without Words: 10 Keys to Thriving in Your Spiritually Mismatched Marriage* and author of *The Soul Saver*. Visit Dineen online at MismatchedandThriving.com.