

YOUR HOPES AND EXPECTATIONS OF MARRIAGE

When I sat down with my wife's father to ask him if I could marry his daughter, he told me that he had thought for a long time about what to tell the young man who asked to marry her. He said, "Here is what I have concluded: You never know what you are getting into until you have gotten into it!" I didn't fully understand what he was saying until much later. He was trying to tell me (without pouring cold water on my enthusiasm) that marriage might not be what I hoped and expected it to be. I have come to appreciate the wisdom in those words!

It is an interesting study of the Gospel accounts to see how Jesus dealt with the expectation people placed on him as they understood him to be the Messiah. Jesus disappointed many people because they had inappropriate expectations of him. Perhaps the most surprising example is John the Baptist. John said of Jesus, "Behold, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, after me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for he was before me" (John 1:29-30). He heard God testify about Jesus being his son when he baptized him and the Spirit descended upon him in the form of a dove (Luke 3:21-22). Later John was put in prison, and he did not expect this! He sent two of his disciples to Jesus to ask this question, "Art thou he that should come? Or look we for another?" (Luke 7:19). John was satisfied that Jesus was the Messiah after hearing his answer! He had to readjust his expectations to God's. Perhaps this will need to happen before your wedding and at times during your marriage.

You have a number of hopes, dreams, and expectations about your marriage. What you are looking forward to in marriage may not be the same things your fiancé is anticipating. Hopefully you will have some overlap! It is valuable to talk together about what you hope marriage will be before your wedding. This discussion can help you have a more realistic picture of your future marriage relationship. It will also help you learn more of your spouse's love language. You will not be able to think of all your hopes and expectations. You may not even know that you have an expectation until something happens that surprises you in your marriage! Do your best to articulate your hopes.

Dr. Willard Harley in his book *His Needs, Her Needs* (Grand Rapids: Revell, 1994) lists the results of interviewing hundreds of couples about their hopes for marriage. He lists the following top five needs that most men and women are looking to marriage to fulfill. I would call them "expectations." There is a difference between a need and an expectation! These lists are given to help you get started as you think of your own expectations.

Her Expectations

Affection

Conversation

Honesty and openness

His Expectations

Sexual fulfillment

Recreational companionship

An attractive spouse

Financial support

Domestic support

Family commitment

Admiration

Ken Nair lists six qualities that endear men to their wives. Perhaps this list of qualities along with the following list of strands of oneness will help you as you compile a list of your expectations and hopes for marriage (*Discovering the Mind of a Woman* [Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995], 51–65).

Qualities That Endear Men to Their Wives

- He can walk in and out of the house without causing damage.
- He will open his heart to her.
- He is sensitive to her and other people.
- He is thoughtful enough to remember the things important to her and is creative and imaginative in doing them.
- He does things with her; he is inclusive and not exclusive.
- He believes they really are one.

Strands of Oneness between a Husband and Wife (in random order)

Submission to God

Humility

Vulnerability

Fidelity

Affirming touch

Shared feelings

Abiding trust

Absence of defenses

Honesty

Similar values

Genuine understanding

Mutual confidence

Forgiveness

Listening to one another

Spiritual harmony

Open communications

Imparted secrets

Sensuous nearness

Closeness without inhibitions

Sexual pleasure lovingly shared

Signs of love freely given & received
Acceptance without rejection

Sharing of responsibilities

Sensitive appreciation of your
spouse's physical & emotional
response

Intellectual agreement on major issues

In thinking about your hopes and expectations for marriage, you might think about marriage relationships you have observed, beginning with your parents. Are there qualities you hope to emulate from those relationships? Are there things you desire to avoid?

If you are sharing a workbook, one person may want to use the workbook to answer the following questions and the other a sheet of paper.

List fifteen hopes and expectations you have regarding your marriage. It may help to begin these with: "My hope for our marriage is ..." "In our marriage I anticipate my husband/wife will ..." "In our marriage I would like my husband/wife to ..." Try to be as specific as possible. After you have both made your lists, compare them.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.
- 11.
- 12.
- 13.
- 14.
- 15.

List ten hopes or expectations you believe your fiancé has for you in your marriage. (Try to list things you feel your fiancé might not be comfortable listing.) Begin these with: *“In our marriage I believe my husband/wife will want me to ...”* *“I anticipate that in our marriage my husband/wife will expect me to ...”*

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.

Now list five hopes or expectations you have for yourself as you enter into marriage.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

After looking over your fiancé’s lists, answer the following questions:

1. Did you find any surprises on your fiancé’s lists? If so, list them.
2. Were there things you thought would be on your fiancé’s lists that were not?
3. Are there things on your fiancé’s lists that you believe to be unrealistic or particularly challenging?
4. How will you respond to your fiancé if things do not happen as you hope?
5. What is the danger of expectations for your spouse in marriage? (You want to be careful not to use these lists as a weapon against your spouse.)
6. Why is it better to have expectations for yourself rather than your fiancé?

7. How will you handle holidays as a married couple? Will your practice change if you have children? (Christmas, Thanksgiving, Easter, etc.).
8. How important were birthdays (or other special events) in your family as you were growing up? Do you like to be surprised with gifts?
9. Do you feel you and your fiancé are equally adaptable and flexible? Why is this important?
10. Who is generally more sensitive, you or your fiancé?
11. Have you had many disappointments in your life or in your relationship?
12. Are you more disappointed by others or about yourself?
13. Which of the following circumstances would be particularly difficult for you?

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| —Financial struggles | —Loss of job |
| —Unable to purchase a home | —Living with parents/in-laws |
| —Spouse attracted to another person | —Parents/in-laws living with you |
| —Someone flirting with your spouse | —Living far away from your family |
| —Discovering you cannot have children | —An unexpected pregnancy |
| —Spouse wrecking the new car | —Spouse getting a chronic illness |
| —Miscarriage | —Legal problems |
| —Spouse disinterested in spiritual things | —Home being burglarized |
| —Child born with a birth defect | —Spouse traveling regularly for job |
| —Spouse disinterested in intimacy | —Tension with in-laws |

14. Can you think of any particular sensitivity you have that the two of you have not discussed to this point and want to discuss with your fiancé?