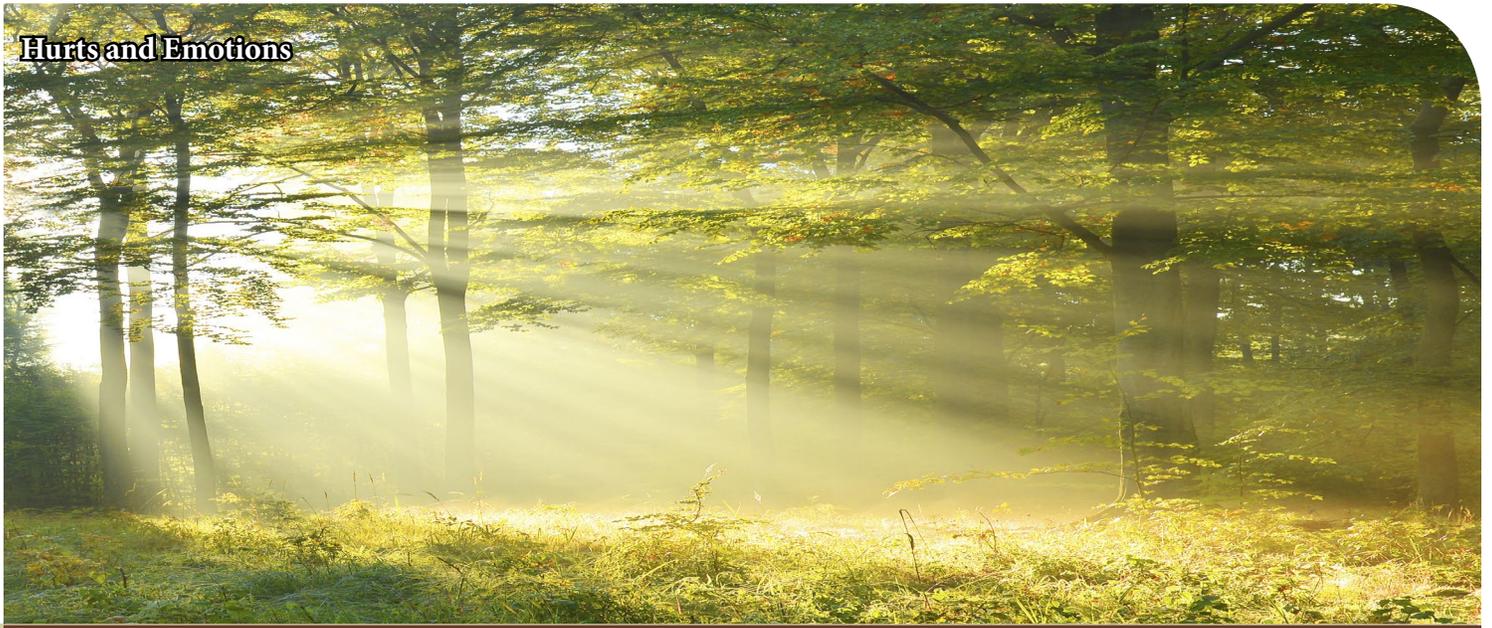


Hurts and Emotions



The Challenge Of Unmet Expectations

a resource from:



APOSTOLIC CHRISTIAN

Counseling and Family Services

The Challenge of Unmet Expectations

“But we trusted...” Luke 24:21

On the road to Emmaus (*Luke 24*): The two hour stroll through the Judean hills was a welcome change. After all Cleopas and his companion had been through in the last week, this seven mile hike from Jerusalem to Emmaus could have been longer. To be sure, the events of this Passover week would take years to unpack. Jesus “*was a prophet mighty in deed and word,*” Cleopas asserted. He was the one who “*should have redeemed Israel.*” He and his companion agreed together, “*We trusted!*” “*He should have!*” Their sad countenance permeated their expressions and manners. Onlookers could detect their dejection.

Raising Lazarus (*John 11*): The past four days were painful. Losing your brother to death was bad enough, but to be ignored by the One you adored made the pain unbearable. “*If thou hadst been here,*” Martha exclaimed to Jesus, “*my brother had not died.*” Mary sat grief stricken in her house, leaving the explaining to Martha. Mary loved the Lord deeply, more than most.

Moses’ rejection (*Deut. 3:25-26*): Moses faithfully led the Israelites for over forty years, weathering rebellion, murmurings, faithlessness and cowardice. The joy of the Promised Land pressed him forward; a land flowing with milk and honey. Yes, a reward worth the struggle indeed. The pronouncement of judgment regarding his failure to speak to the rock when commanded came down like a gavel. “*I pray thee, let me go over, and see the good land!*” Moses pleaded. God replied, “*Let it suffice thee; speak no more unto me of this matter.*”

Moses, Mary, Martha, Cleopas and his companion struggled as we all do – with unmet expectations. “I expected my spouse... I trusted this leading to work out... I hoped my children... I envisioned my job... to be different, to be more, to be better.” Unmet expectations occur and can cause us to spin into confusion, invalidation, despondency, bitterness and doubt. We, like Cleopas, Mary and Moses sometimes raise our voice toward heaven and cry out, “If Thou hadst been here! I expected You to show up!”

Unmet expectations are a type of ambiguous loss, a pain brought on by absence. The soul suffering from this loss grieves the reality that never was. For this reason we often cannot even put our finger on what exactly we are mourning. The loss of not having children, not being married, not being promoted, not having our prayer answered and so on are shrouded in ambiguous loss. The pain of unmet expectations is unique in that its reality grows gradually. The realization our expectation will not be met comes upon us like a dark cloud from off the horizon. We dread its possible approach, investing significant time and energy in worrying about the prospect. When and if it comes, we can deny its arrival. When did Cleopas and his companion come to grips with their shocked realization Jesus was not going to set up His kingdom on earth? Was it when events went terribly “wrong” in the garden? Did the dark cloud loom as Lazarus was struggling for breath? Moses tried to argue the cloud away. Ambiguous loss lacks closure and thus resolution.

Many times this loss gives rise to disenfranchised grief – sadness that is unrecognized and/or unwarranted in the view of others. The view of our grief from the perspective of others is commonly, “Why are you grieving? You have nothing to grieve about.” Disenfranchised grief doesn’t have the luxury of clearly warranted pain, such as the loss of a loved one. It is often borne alone. A feeling of rejection in marriage proposals, miscarriage, unrealized hopes and unmaterialized dreams are examples of ambiguous loss that give rise to disenfranchised grief. At times like these we may exclaim with those of old, “But I trusted!”

The Challenge of Unmet Expectations

One will quickly realize the matter of unmet expectations lies in either the “meeting of the expectation” or the “expectation” itself. Furthermore, the responsibility of “meeting the expectation” is not wholly ours. A dozen factors which lie outside of our control can all have influence on this aspect. The “expectation,” on the other hand, is owned by the soul who possesses it. Therefore, we turn our gaze to our expectations.

While we cannot escape having expectations, we can cradle them in a larger understanding. This understanding will give context to our expectations and a lens through which we can process meeting them. A few key points to consider:

1. **Find meaning in God:** We so easily search for meaning in our spouses, careers, children, possessions etc. What we possess should not impute or give meaning to the possessor. God has purchased us with His highest currency. He did so not out of obligation but out of desire. Our meaning is not a product of our environment, status or accomplishments. Our meaning comes down from Him on High.
PRINCIPLE: The possessor imputes meaning to the possessed and God is our Possessor.
2. **Understand the fallen state of the world:** The curse of sin has touched every area of our lives. Mistakes and errors are common among us and in those things in which we invest expectation. In many cases, our expectations would have been met – if it were a perfect world.
PRINCIPLE: Expectations do not naturally take into account the fallen nature of this world.
3. **Have your identity redeemed:** Jesus Christ has met all the expectations of the Father to redeem this world. His perfect payment was sufficient and adequate for our redemption. We who believe and have repented of our sin are hid and complete in Him (*Col. 2:10, 3:3*).
PRINCIPLE: When God sees me He sees Christ.
4. **Rest in hope:** The gospel speaks hope into our situations. His “higher ways” have been the marks of His praise through the ages (*Is. 55:8-9*). Resurrection instead of healing for Lazarus, Savior of the world instead of King of the earth to Cleopas, and Heavenly inheritance instead of an earthly promise to Moses.
PRINCIPLE: God’s expectations are better than ours, and His are always met.

Throughout time, God has used unmet expectations in His workings with men. Our unmet expectations put us in a place to see God’s purposes more clearly. “*And to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?*” Isaiah prophesied of the coming Messiah. “*For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.*” No doubt this prophesy mystified the hearer. It undershot the character expectations of the Messiah so much its revelation was missed by most. From the angels declaring the lowly birth of our Savior to the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost, man’s expectations have often been turned on their head, thereby righting themselves to the reality God desires.

God understands unmet expectations. They are near to His heart. The grief associated with them might be hidden from others, but it is felt by Him. After all, Isaiah goes on to announce Jesus is “*acquainted with grief*” – He has “*carried our sorrows*” and was “*wounded for our transgressions*” – all for our healing (*Is. 53*). Yes, God understands. And He cares.

“My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from him.” Psalms 62:5