

Foundations

A Newsletter for Married Couples

December 2018

Expectations about marriage are like a roadmap. You have an idea about where you're going when you get married, and you have an idea about how to get there. Your spouse also has an idea about the marriage destination and how to get there. Now it may be the same place you're heading and you may have the same route planned out to get there. OR you may have two really different ideas about what a marriage is supposed to look like, in which case it's unlikely that you'll be plotting the same route. The other option is that you could have done some good talking beforehand about what you both think a marriage should look like, but you have very different ideas about how to reach that goal. This issue of Foundations is about exploring the goals you've set for your marriage, and comparing the routes you each think will be the best way to get there.

Creating the Route

Like any other part of your life, your marriage is something you have your own ideas about. You might want a marriage that looks pretty much like the one your parents have. Maybe you want a marriage based on one from a movie you have seen, or one like a neighbor or a relative. Marriages can be close or distant, very communicative or very formal – there are many styles that couples choose to live out their relationship. Every time you see a marriage either in real life or in fiction, you hold that image up and compare it with the one you envision for your marriage.

What Does “simple” Mean?

You can imagine how valuable it would be for you and your spouse, not only to have the same ideas about what you want your



marriage to look like, but also to have the same roadmap about how to get there! A young couple we know both agreed that they wanted to live a simple life, but they had different ideas about what that meant. For him, it meant not having the latest technology. For her it meant not buying anything from a national chain store, and not eating meat. They are working to come to an agreement about how living simply will play out in their marriage. They thought they were on the same page, but it turned out that their roadmaps were significantly different.

Ah Yes, Holidays!

Holidays are a great time to notice a difference in expectations. How you celebrate, how you set a budget for gifts, what constitutes the holiday season, both in terms of time and in terms of activities – these are all things that are full of expectations. It may take some of your

best negotiating skills to carve out a path that works for the two of you. When will you get a tree? Will you have a tree? Who will you visit and when? How much will you spend on presents for family and friends? How much on each other?

No Need for Perfection Here

Recognizing your expectations helps you deal with them in a more conscious way, and sorting them out is one of the jobs you have in marriage. And as you figure them out, be kind to yourself. Don't feel like you have to be the perfect wife or husband, and don't feel that you have to craft the perfect marriage, since really there is no such thing. Your role in the marriage and the marriage itself is a work in progress. You will get more comfortable with your role as you go along, and the two of you will feel better about the way the marriage is unfolding as you make compromises and reveal to each other the expectations you have. ■

Reading From a Different Script

A letter from a *Foundations* reader posed a great example of expectation: “I had many worries when we got married about the things I saw as different. My husband was from Denver. I was from New York. Where would we settle? I was an active Catholic, he a non-active Protestant. How would we handle our spirituality? There were many areas where we seemed worlds apart. I thought we would be trying to handle them.

Instead, our issues were about him dropping crumbs on the floor when he ate, or his discomfort with me cleaning when he wanted us to be relaxing.”

Habits Differing

It’s a kind of truism that the cap left off the toothpaste or dirty socks on the floor are the things that irritate and cause friction in marriage. While they are small in a way, they are the things that are there every day and have the power to annoy constantly.

Was that something that surprised you

in your marriage? If your expectation was that you would have the same habits and same standards of tidiness, it’s got to be frustrating to find out that’s not the case. So what’s the answer?

Strategies

There are a couple of strategies you can try. One is to trade tasks. He keeps the toothpaste in the manner he prefers it, and you have a bin for dirty socks that you keep handy. Your marriage is a thing that needs attending with both of you on board to keep it healthy, and being annoyed or frustrated doesn’t help.

Some of our expectations come from the family we grew up in, so the second tip is to check out whether they are realistic in your marriage. If your mother did not work outside the home then she may have had responsibility for more of the order inside the house. With the two of you working expectations have to be adjusted.



Baby Steps

There is a book entitled *Small Change*, and its point is that by making small changes you can have a big impact on your quality of life. So try it out when your expectations don’t line up the way you hoped they would. Our reader did, and she was very happy with the outcome. ■



Christmas Greeting

There is nothing I can give you which you have not got; but there is much, very much, that, while I cannot give it, you can take.

No Heaven can come to us unless our hearts find rest in it today. Take Heaven! No peace lies in the future which is not hidden in this present little instant. Take peace!

The gloom of the world is but a shadow. Behind it, yet within our reach, is joy. There is radiance and glory in the darkness, could we but see; and to see, we have only to look. Take joy!

And so, at this Christmas time, I greet you; not quite as the world sends greetings, but with profound esteem, and with the prayer that for you, now and forever, the day breaks and the shadows flee away.

Fra Giovanni

Exercises

I know/understand:

	Yes	No	Uncertain
My expectations for our marriage have changed since we married.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
What my expectations are for this marriage.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Many expectations are unspoken.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We have had arguments about our different expectations of each other.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

I believe:

	Yes	No	Uncertain
It is important to be clear about expectations in marriage.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We have discussed what our expectations are for the next few years.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Our expectations are different from those of our friends and family.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Our faith has shaped our expectations of marriage.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

I will:

	Yes	No	Uncertain
Consider if my expectations of me and my spouse are realistic.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Discuss my expectations about how we celebrate holidays.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Live up to our shared expectations.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Be ready to compromise to meet my spouse's expectations.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

There's no place like home for the holidays



Traditions have a way of sneaking up on you. One year you put off shopping until the last minute. The day before Christmas you meet after work, have a quick dinner, and start a marathon

shopping spree that ends at midnight. It's crazy, stressful, but also a lot of fun. So you do it the same way the next year, and all of a sudden it's a tradition!

As you establish your own family traditions, you are probably borrowing some from the families you came from and then adding your own. Are there some things that are really important to you around the holidays?

My favorite holiday foods are _____

An important custom is _____

I like the following decorations _____

Carols or Christmas songs I like are _____

The best time to exchange gifts is _____

I like to give to the following causes _____

We should visit families on (yours) _____

(mine) _____

A religious service I'd like to attend with you is _____

Spirituality

What Are You Waiting For?

Holiday decorations started appearing in stores in early October and by the time you receive the December issue of Foundations the season will be in full swing. Couples will be shopping, running to parties and figuring out how to see everyone in their families in a compressed period of time. Christmas day is often hectic and all this activity comes to an abrupt halt the next day when any people go back to work.



nervous they wait in joyful anticipation for the birth of their son or daughter.

Another person waits for a sick child to get well and remembers all the wonderful qualities of that child. How precious and fragile life is, and how often we take it for granted.

A couple saves for a new house and they think about what it will be like to have their own home while they wait to accumulate enough money and for the right house to come along.

The Season of Advent

In the Christian tradition it wasn't always this way. Traditionally, there was a season of waiting called Advent during which celebrations were put on hold and we were asked to reflect on what is important in our lives. The official position is still that during the four weeks that precede Christmas Day we are asked to experience in a small way what the early believers experienced, a longing for a savior. They waited through persecution and poverty, year after year, for someone to come to their rescue.

Pressure, Pressure

In our own time the question, "What are you waiting for?" is meant to convey a sense of urgency. "Come on, let's go, what are you waiting for?" We want things to happen. We are people on the go and under a deadline. We also are put under the pressure of believing that we can have it all (whatever "it" is) and we deserve to have it now.

Is There Anything Good about Waiting?

It's as if the question is an accusation, and waiting is a fault. But is waiting a waste of time, or can something good happen while we are waiting?

I know a couple who are waiting for the birth of their first child. They have tried to conceive before and miscarried. This pregnancy seems to be going well and although they're a little

And You

At Michael's, the craft store, they are selling a turkey table centerpiece that has no tail feathers. You are meant to write something you are grateful for every day leading up to Thanksgiving on a tail feather and stick it in the turkey, so by Thanksgiving he would have a full tail. For Christmas we could do the same with a small tree decorated each day by a dream of hope, for ourself or for our marriage.

What are you waiting for this Advent? What would make your life complete? What lessons are you learning as you wait, in joyful anticipation? Whatever it is, enjoy the wait! ■



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