

Escape From Ungodly Expectations

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The Saturday morning prayer meeting started with small talk as the small group of men began to arrive. It was a comfortable setting, a familiar place, and a group who had met together for a number years. Conversation flowed as coffee was poured and seats were taken around the table. It was a typical Saturday morning, as the focus turned from superficial banter to testimonies of answered prayer and various needs personally and in the community. As the meeting progressed, someone mentioned that it was too bad that other leaders in the community weren't there having fellowship and prayer with us. We missed them. As we prayed and continued, it was suggested that we go to the elders of another church and personally invite them to gather together with us so that we could renew long standing relationships and have an opportunity to break bread together. This seemed like God's plan, so I volunteered to meet with these men and invite them to a cookout at my home.

The phone call was cordial, as I explained the idea to a precious brother who said he would convey the message to the elders, and he soon called back with an invitation for me to come to their next meeting and share with their elder body. I was encouraged by the response and began to look forward to the meeting with some anticipation. I, however, began to have a very strong impression that I was to have no expectation for the outcome. I wasn't sure what that meant, so I began to pray about it, and the impression became stronger. I was to continue with the process of sharing with the elders, inviting them, etc., but I was to have **no** expectation for the result. It was to trust God and not worry about anything else.

The meeting started with prayer, a few needs were voiced, more prayer and then I was up to bat. I shared the vision for the need to come together, and proceeded to invite the men and their wives to our cookout on Sunday after their church time. Everyone was positive. Yes, this was something that was needed, and it was important enough to make it a priority. Everyone's schedule would work, and all accepted the invitation and would certainly be there.

The Sunday of the cookout arrived and I cleaned the patio, prepared food and drinks, and hustled around taking care of last minute details. The time of the invitation came and then went, and none of the folks from that group showed up. And nobody even called to say that they weren't coming!

There was a time when I would have been devastated by something like this. Not to mention hurt, rejected, bitter, just plain mad, etc., etc. But there was total peace through the whole afternoon. The one friend that showed up (others had called and couldn't make it) and my wife and I had a wonderful dinner together and a special time of fellowship. It was a precious afternoon in the Lord.

I still believe that there will be a time for the leaders in the community to come closer together. But that meeting was not for them, it was for me. God had said that I was to have no expectations for that meeting. I didn't. Father had ordered something in my life that brought freedom and peace to me in a way I had never experienced. I wasn't hurt, I wasn't mad, and I wasn't standing in judgement of anyone. I had heard God and the outcome didn't matter. I was free from my own expectations and it really felt good.

It is now several months later, and I was just reflecting on the power that my expectations had in my life. Disappointments had the power to burst my greatest bubble and bring me to the place of discouragement and even depression. Surely the process is continuing, and there will be other lessons that Father brings to the classroom of life. But this is an important lesson. It's a lesson that can bring freedom and a stronger relationship with God and with one another.

Much of what goes on in the church (and the world, for that matter) is based on the expectations of people. We look to others to supply our need. We go to meetings sometimes because we expect someone to say the things we need to hear, or support our vision or ministry. If they don't perform to our expectations, then we will be disappointed. If we continue the process, then we become hurt and bitter and relationships can be damaged in the body. The joints no longer are properly connected, the sinews no longer move in unison.

There is a greater damage that can occur. It occurs in the spiritual realm. It can't be seen with our natural eyes, but it can alter everything around us that we do see. When people place expectations on one another, or obligate another to do something by manipulating them in some manner, there is a binding that can take place in the spiritual realm. This binding can intensify the hurt, rejection, bitterness, etc., can cause separation and isolation, and, most importantly, can make prayers ineffective (bitterness) and limit the ability for a person to hear or relate to the Spirit of God. There is another biblical name for control and manipulation. It is called sorcery, or witchcraft. It has to do with taking or giving up control to something or someone else. Look up the word sorcery in your bible dictionary for some further insight.

Jesus came to set the captives free. We are His people and our mission is to re-present Him in the world. He released everyone He ministered to. The woman at the well, the woman caught in adultery, the tax-gatherers, the thief on the cross, etc., etc. One of the greatest purposes of the church must be the releasing of one another from the bondage of our own expectations.

God has expectations. He created us. He knows who we are and what our purposes are. His expectations are much greater and better than ours. They are perfect. His expectations are the things that faith is made of. Our expectations have to die daily. But remember the parable of the seed? After the planting and the death comes the resurrection. That is the call to the body of Christ. Resurrection life! Let's release one another from *our* expectations and bondage and encourage one another in God's expectations. God bless.