

Why Our Expectations of God Are Unrealistic

In my last blog post I talked about “Unrealistic Expectations” and promised to explore some of the reasons our expectations of God are unrealistic (and thus why we get frustrated or even furious with Him). I mentioned several ways in which we think God *should* act. Here are my responses to why those expectations are unrealistic.

- *Show the same grace to all of us by treating us all the same*

No child ever has to be taught about fairness. The heart’s cry for justice is part of our design. But we are broken in our understanding of so many things, and we usually equate fairness with equality. We want God to treat everyone the same way. But God isn’t doing the same thing in everyone; He is creating a masterpiece that will bring glory to Him and goodness to us for all eternity, and His means and tools will differ from person to person. Creating a masterpiece of sculpture in a piece of marble takes different tools and techniques than creating a masterpiece of an oil painting. It’s a good thing that God doesn’t treat us all the same.

- *Give us an easy life*

Easy, sheltered, enabled lives produce spoiled, entitled children. God’s intention is that we grow up to maturity, which necessitates learning to survive the bumps in the road and the harder aspects of living in a fallen world. He is creating an adult, glorious bride for the Lamb, who is fit to reign with Him. An easy life is completely inadequate to the task of preparing us as the church to become the bride of Christ.

- *If I do all the right things to be “a good person,” God should do His part to make life work the way I want it to*

That linear “A ensures B” kind of thinking makes sense to our limited, immature minds, but reality doesn’t work that way. We cannot manipulate God to make life work the way we want it to. We are part of a much bigger picture that involves spiritual warfare, the battle against our own flesh, and God’s purposes that can only be accomplished in ways we don’t understand in the process.

One of the most important places of understanding God wants us to reach is the profound truth I saw on a t-shirt once:

2 essential truths:

1. There is a God.
2. You are not him.

God is God, and we are not. We don’t get to dictate the way life works, and God will lovingly bring us to the point, as many times as necessary, where we let go of the illusion that we are in control.

He is in control. We are not. And that’s a good thing.

But the granddaddy of unrealistic, albeit understandably so, expectations are these:

- *Protect the innocent from pain and suffering*
- *Protect the people who maybe-aren’t-so-innocent-but-not-as-bad-as-axe-murderers from pain and suffering*

This is really the bottom line issue for most problems with our understanding of God, the age-old difficult question, “How can a good and loving God allow pain and suffering?”

The bottom line answer is that because of the sinful choices of Adam and Eve, we all live in a world where evil and suffering were unleashed. Our world is now fallen and corrupt, and bad things happen all the time. Part of the equation is that God honors our choices, which are significant and real—even the choices that bring unintended consequences of pain and suffering. Yet God is in control, and He can redeem even the most heinous choices and the most awful pain and suffering. He delights to exchange “a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair” (Isaiah 61:3).

We have a hard time imagining how God can bring good out of evil, and especially out of our pain. Sometimes it’s even harder when we look outside ourselves, to the suffering of innocent children such as the growing number of children abused and murdered by their mothers’ boyfriends. And I really don’t have an answer for that; I just know that God is good, and He is loving, and my inability to see how He will make it all okay in the end does not affect whether it’s true or not.

One of my favorite stories comes from my dear friend whom I’ll call Emily, who was not only raped repeatedly by her father from the time she was two years old, but he would take money from his friends so they could abuse her as well. Emily has a vibrant relationship with Jesus, especially because she has learned to listen to Him.

One day after the Holy Spirit gently restored a vivid memory of one of these gang-rape sessions for her to process, she said, “Jesus, I had a sense of being covered in something heavy, like a stack of blankets, while the abuse was going on. What was that about?” The Lord lovingly told her, “That was Me lying on top of you, protecting you from the full brunt of the abuse you were experiencing. The men had to come through Me to get to you, and I took a portion of their evil into Myself before it got to you.” Through her tears, she asked, “But why? How could there possibly be any good to come out of that horrific sexual abuse?” Jesus said, “Beloved, you are a diamond of great value. Every incident of abuse that you sustained was a hammer and chisel in My Father’s hands, creating a new facet in the diamond. When you see the finished product, you won’t believe the stunning beauty of the jewel that you are. And you will say it was worth it.”

(Incidentally, Emily hasn’t had to wait till heaven to start seeing the value of her horrific suffering. She has been able to be “Jesus with skin on” to other wounded women and children because she understands their suffering.)

The reason our expectations of God are so often unrealistic is because He is so much bigger, so much more glorious, so much more loving, so much more in control, than we can possibly comprehend. May we grow in our understanding as He continues to prove Himself faithful and good—in everything.

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