

Q & A with Paul David Tripp
Author of *What Did You Expect? Redeeming the Realities of Marriage*

You write that all couples enter marriage with some unrealistic expectations. Isn't this something you resolve in premarital counseling?

I wish it were that easy! But it's almost as though each potential husband and wife is motivated to dismiss the truth about what they will inevitably face. In the midst of the power of premarital romance, it is very hard to get yourself to want to take a hard and honest look at reality. You are in love, and you are sure that everything will work out right. Most couples are simply not interested in being realistic.

What perspectives can we keep in mind in order to keep our expectations of marriage (and life!) in check?

There are three wisdom perspectives from Scripture that enable us to have realistic expectations for marriage:

- First, you are conducting your marriage in a fallen world. This means we all face the same thing and your marriage will be touched every day by the brokenness of our world.
- Second, you are married to a sinner. We just don't get to be married to someone perfect. Your life will be affected by the sin, weakness, and failure of the person you are living with. And at some point you will sin against your spouse.
- Finally, you must remember that God is with you. You are not alone in your struggle. Yes, you live in a bad neighborhood (fallen world), and the two of you are less than perfect (sin), but in all this you are not left to your own resources.

Is every marriage destined for struggle?

It happens to everyone. It is the unavoidable reality of marriage. Somehow, someday, every marriage becomes a struggle. Everyone's marriage becomes something they didn't intend it to be. Spending time together is radically different from living together. Reasons for attraction now become sources of irritation. At some point you need something sturdier than romance. You need something deeper than shared interests and mutual attraction. You need something more than marital survival skills. In every marriage either giddy romance wanes and is replaced with a sturdier and more mature love, or the selfishness of sin reduces the marriage to a state of relational *détente*.

So what do we do when this inevitable point of disillusionment collides with our expectations?

Both the problem and the solution can be summed up in one word: worship. I have become more and more persuaded that marriages are fixed vertically before they are ever fixed horizontally. We have to deal with what is driving us before we ever deal with how we are reacting to one another. Every relationship is victimized in some way when we seek to get from the surrounding creation what we were designed to get from God. When God is in his rightful place, then we are on the way to putting people in their rightful place. I am convinced it is only in the worship of God in our marriages that we find reason to continue.

Being a worshiper means that you attach your identity, meaning and purpose, and your inner sense of well-being to something. You either get these things vertically (from the Creator) or you look to get them horizontally (from the creation). This insight has everything to do with how a marriage becomes what it is. No marriage will be unaffected when the people in the marriage are seeking to get from the creation what they were only ever meant to get from the Creator.

Tell us more about the power of worship in marriage.

This is the bottom line: the war for our marriages is a war of worship. The fundamental problem of every marriage is misplaced worship. The cure of every marriage is renewed worship of God. Does it sound too simple? Well, it is and it isn't. Although this principle is true of every marriage, the war and the cure look different for every couple.

This may not sound very romantic, but my intention is not to disrespect romance. I love romance. On the vast continuum of what defines matrimony, I am way over on the romantic end. But a good marriage doesn't grow out of the soil of romance. No, the soil in which a good marriage grows is the soil of worship, and the fruit that a good marriage produces is sweet, long-term, mutually satisfying romance.

What do you say to the couple who says "we're just too different to make it work."

First of all, don't run away in fear. You haven't made a horrible mistake. What you are dealing with is part of the plan. And it really is a gorgeous plan; in your marriage God will take you where you never thought you would go in order to give you what you could not achieve on your own. He is working on something that is very good—lasting personal change—and he is with you during the process. He is giving you what you need to be, what you have been designed to be, and to do what you have been called to do. Now, that is a reason to be encouraged, even on the days that are difficult.

Explain how praying for your marriage, and praying together, can affect a marriage relationship.

The Bible reveals that we are kingdom-minded people, and we either live in service to the kingdom of self to serve the kingdom of God. So when you are hurt, angry or disappointed with your husband or wife, it is not because he or she has broken the laws of God's kingdom, and it really concerns you. No, you are most often angry because your spouse has broken the laws of your kingdom. And the problem is that our spouse does the same thing. So, it will just be a matter of time before the carnage begins as our little kingdoms of one collide.

Reconciling your marriage begins when you begin to reconcile with God. It begins when you begin to pray this radical prayer: "Your kingdom come, your will be done, right here, right now in this marriage as it is in heaven." Good things happen as a result of that prayer!

What Did You Expect? Redeeming the Realities of Marriage

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