

GREAT – and not so great – EXPECTATIONS
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Julie Guggenbiller

Hi there...How's everyone this morning?

You know what's funny?

The last time I was up here, I talked about how God wants us to know that His love for us exists in Christ and not in our good or bad circumstances. We talked about Christians being thrown to lions and how Faith allowed them to be overcomers and receive A Kingdom That Cannot Be Shaken...And how when Faith is working in us, that same thing will happen in us because Faith let's us see all things with God's mind and through His point of view and we will see that though "in this world we will have tribulation, He has overcome the world'....

Remember?

Well that afternoon I went home and did my normal Sunday afternoon stuff-- laundry, cleaning, cooking--- you know...And while I was walking upstairs, I slipped in some sloppy slippers and fell. And since I happened to have my hands in my pockets when I fell, I couldn't catch myself fast enough and ended up smacking my cheek on a step and got a black eye.

By the way, the moral of that story is "Don't walk with your hands in your pockets because you never know when you're going to need them!" :)

And 3 days later, just about when I was getting pretty good at covering my bruise with makeup, I was wearing those same sloppy slippers and tripped again on my stairs, only this time when I fell, I broke my foot!

That was the beginning of a very frustrating 3 week stint on crutches, not to mention another 3 weeks in a cast...

And in the beginning, while I was still getting used to getting around on crutches, thinking I would be fine if I just went slowly, I attempted to walk across an icy, snowy sidewalk. Well of course, the more intelligent among us know that ice and crutches don't mix because ice provides zero traction!

Needless to say, after one step, I slipped and fell, banging my head against the concrete, and ended up with a nice lump the size of an egg!

I told you all of that because number 1, I want you to feel sorry for me! :)

And number 2, just to let you know that this past month I had plenty of opportunity to practice what I preached the month before!

Now in the beginning of my "trial", I managed fairly well because it was all kind of new and it was sort of like an adventure...I've always wanted to be one of those inspirational people who rise to challenges gracefully, and I thought maybe this was my chance to prove to myself that I was indeed an overcomer!

But about one week into the whole thing, my body was sore, I was tired of my freedom being hampered and my patience was wearing thin...And dealing with the frustration and inconvenience of not being able to easily do what I was used to doing began to take it's toll and my true colors began to show.

And in the middle of all of that, I discovered that I had some very specific things I wanted God and everyone else to come through for me on... and surprise, surprise, from my perspective, it looked like they didn't.....

Now I know we don't set out to dash one another's expectations on purpose to teach each other lessons or anything-- and I don't think God does that either. But in the same breath, having

unmet expectations CAN teach us something, if we're willing to humble our hearts and learn their lesson....

So that's what I want to talk to you about this morning. Expectations....In fact, I'm calling today's message:

Great-- and not so great-- Expectations.

We're going to look at the word "expectation" from several angles: Our expectation on God, His expectation on us and lastly, our expectations on each other.

Of course, this won't be an exhaustive study on expectations. I am no bible scholar. And sometimes I feel kind of bad because when I get the opportunity to share, I always tend to "fish" from the Pool Of True Things I've recently learned, most of which have dawned on me through specific situations and circumstances in my life.

I know you know this, but I feel like I should say it anyway...It's not really the circumstances THEMSELVES that bring us into the knowledge of the Truth-- we all know plenty of people who have lived through a whole lot of hard things and have learned nothing redeeming to show for it.

Spiritual truth is learned WHENEVER a heart turns to the Lord. It's that simple. And that can be when we are listening to a sermon or reading the word on our own or in the middle of a tough situation...

It's not so important what we are doing when we see the Lord... The important thing is that we see Him.

And I know we've heard this many times before but I'm going to say it again. The only thing that limits the revealing of Christ in us is the condition of our heart....We have to be open to seeing Him AS HE IS and not as we want Him to be.

This past week I did an experiment-- I opened the bible and read randomly, not looking for anything in particular.

I say "randomly," but I guess I mean more that I read with no expectation.

You see lately I've been noticing more and more, that I read the word on an "as needed" basis...In other words, I always feel the urge to read scripture when I am looking for something. I read for comfort, for guidance-- or even just to feel good about myself because we all know that real Christians read their bibles!

In other words, I don't usually read hoping the Lord will reveal Himself to me AS HE IS.... Usually I read hoping that I will find some spiritual nugget hidden inside the words to help me find what I think I need...

Another way to say that is that generally I find I read the bible with an expectation that, in some sneaky way, has me at the center.

So anyway, I was reading the passage in Romans about all creation groaning and the Spirit making intercession for us. And to those of us who've spent time in Charismatic / Pentecostal circles, it's a very familiar chapter with a very familiar interpretation.

But that day, though it was the same "package" I'd been staring at for years, Romans 8 suddenly looked different. I could see that among other things, it was talking about the expectation God had in His heart when He created this natural world.

It seemed clear that while the natural creation was INVOLVED in God's expectation, the natural creation wasn't the center of God's expectation-- but God's Son was!

I'm going to take a minute and read the verses out loud for us.....Romans 8:18-28

'For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God.

For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now.

Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.

For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope, for why does one still hope for what he sees?

But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance.

Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.'

God didn't create the world willy-nilly, just because it sounded like a good idea...God created with purpose and with expectation.

And remember, biblical expectation is kind of like a pregnant woman...She doesn't "hope" she's having a baby anymore. She expects to have one!

So when God created, it was with an expectation in mind that involved the natural creation, but only because they were going to be the recipients, the "containers," the place of manifestation of a spiritual gift that Paul said made "the sufferings of this present time not worthy to be compared to the glory which shall be revealed in us"

I thought this was interesting. Notice that verses 20-21 say that it was GOD who subjected all creation to futility.

My dictionary's definition of futility is: "A lack of importance or purpose; the quality of having no useful result; ineffectiveness, vanity, imagination."

So why would God would subject creation to futility? Verse 21 answers that question: God subjected creation to futility because He had an expectation of bringing it into glory.

But I don't think it was like God was feeling mean so He "forced" the natural creation to become futile and empty and enslaved to vain imaginations.

It was more like creation was ALREADY futile and empty and enslaved to vain imaginations, but until the judgment of the Cross took place (and remember judgment means "a division"), the natural creation couldn't be seen for what it was.

Saying "God subjected creation to futility," is virtually the same thing as saying "On the Cross Truth separated light from darkness and now whoever is born of the Light, can expect to see with greater and greater clarity, the futility, lies, emptiness and vanity inherent in any creation that exists outside of the Life of God..."

The Cross revealed the Otherness of God-- the Great Divide between God and Creation-- but the Cross also healed the Great Divide by bringing the whole created realm into the death of the Cross, so forever, those who want to, can come out of slavery to futility and live in the liberty of the Life of the Son.

That's what Salvation is. It's you and me coming to know and share in the Life and Goodness-- the very being-- of the Son of God. It's not limited to a certain day in our past but it's a reality of Life we can know now. It's an existence which we've already been brought into, which is why the Spirit "intercedes" within us to reveal the One who has become our life.

The flipside of that coin is that if anyone chooses remain outside of Salvation -- meaning a true knowing of the Son -- he will remain forever stuck in the futility and purposelessness of the natural creation.

You know, we are so used to thinking that God has an expectation on us. That He requires us to DO something or BE something or ACCOMPLISH something in the earth...

In fact, I realized recently that even in the middle of knowing Christ as my life for the past few years, I STILL labored under the underlying false assumption that the whole reason He was letting me see true things is because He was expecting me to manifest Christ to the world!

You probably don't need me to tell you, but that is a lot of pressure to live under!

The goal isn't the effect of truth working in us, the goal is to LET truth work in us. Thinking God expects us to manifest Christ in every situation because we've seen something true is wrong!

Listen carefully: God has NO expectations on YOU to do anything because "You have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God."

God isn't revealing Christ in us because He expects us to turn around and be something we can never be. God reveals Christ in us because it is what is real. It's finished and it's what is true.

God's expectation for us is that we come into a knowledge of the Truth through the revealing of His Son as your life -- through seeing your Salvation.

The only life God sees when He looks at you is the Life of His Son...And that's enough for Him because His Son has been the center of His expectation all along! :)

Christ fulfilled God's entire expectation and Christ IS the fulfillment of God's entire expectation! Which means that God isn't expecting us to do anything except to turn our heart to know the truth.

Truth and Love go hand in hand. Revealing the Truth to us is how God loves us. When we resist the Truth, we resist God's love.

OK...I'm going to take a turn from talking about God's expectation on us and talk a bit on our expectations on Him and on each other...

Back to my broken foot....

Several Sundays ago I drove to Akron to go to church. I was still on crutches at the time which made getting around in snow kind of difficult, but since I'd missed a few meetings and was feeling

rather far away from God and all of you, I decided that even though it might be tricky, I really needed to go to church.

Now I live about two blocks from the lake which means that the weather at my house isn't necessarily the weather in Akron. And most times, that doesn't really matter too much.

Well when I left my house that Sunday, our sidewalks and roads up north were wet and clear of ice and snow and I thought to myself "Good...I'll be able to get into church with no problem, even though I'm on crutches."

However, when I pulled into the parking lot, much to my dismay, there was not one speck of blacktop showing! Everywhere I looked, all I saw was packed snow and slippery ice!

I knew then and there that there was no way I was going to be able to negotiate the parking lot without falling. And I'm not sure why, but it didn't occur to me to call one of you to come out to help me, even though I know any of you would have been happy to do it...

Knowing I'd come all that way only to find I wasn't going to be able to get into the church made me mad! I turned the car around and headed home, complaining to the Lord while I drove.

I told Him how hurt and disappointed I was because it seemed to me that if He really loved me, He could have proved it by making it easier for me to get inside the church. After all, how hard would it have been for Him to melt one little path to the door for me?! I didn't actually say those words, but that was the attitude I was speaking out from.

And though I knew it didn't make sense and that it really wasn't anyone's fault, I felt let down by all of you, too, because no one thought to call me to let me know Akron was still icy and not to

bother to come. Again, I know that doesn't make sense and that the telephone works both ways!

About halfway home, when I finally got quiet, this sentence sort of plopped itself into my heart. It was short and sweet and to the point and I knew it was the Lord.

I heard Him say "I am not your Prince Charming."

And in that moment of truth I felt Him gently tell me that the promises He give us aren't in the natural realm-- I just assume they are-- therefore when I expect Him to do something and He doesn't, I get mad.

And immediately I saw that though that specific thought had never entered my mind before, He was right. It sounds cheesy, but I really DID want a God who was like a Prince Charming!

I wanted a God who would come through for me by rescuing me out of every difficulty -- even in something as silly as walking across a parking lot.

And then I knew I had a decision to make. The decision was: Who am I going to choose -- Him or me? Am I going to accept God's version of who He said he is or am I going to cling to my understanding of Him?

We can fight the reality of this until the day we die, but the bottom-line is, if something isn't true, it's not true! And it doesn't matter how hard we believe it or how many times we've heard someone tell us it's true, if it's not true, it --- isn't!

I mean, it's not like admitting something isn't true means we will lose anything because if something's not true, there was never anything there to lose in the first place!

Did you understand that? How can we lose what we never had?

Losing our imaginations can feel HUGE to our hearts, but only until we see clearly what we've gained in Christ.

Remember how in Romans it says that " we don't know how to pray as we ought but the Spirit helps our weakness because He knows what the mind of the Lord is, therefore He intercedes for us according to the will of God?

Well intercession means 'acting as one who goes between parties with a view toward reconciling the differences between them'.

So as an intercessor, the Holy Spirit sheds light and communicates Truth to our spirits, so our view of what's real can line up with what God knows to be real.

Truth works in us to progressively unravel our imaginations; For example, we see His Life and come to know ourselves as dead; His Light dawns in our hearts, dispelling our darkness....

One of the Spirit's roles in the life of the believer is to reconcile the two views – God's and man's– into one view-- God's!

I don't know if I can say this well, but in the light of Romans 8, I can see that having false expectations on God is not only pointless because they give us nothing real, false expectations on Him actually cause us to forfeit reality. How can we know what we've been given if we think we already know what we've got?

There is one last thing I wanted to talk about today and it has to do with the "not so great" expectations we place on one another, especially as it relates to those of us in the body of Christ.

We've all experienced it-- disappointment and disillusionment with others because for some reason we think they aren't giving us what we deserve. Or maybe we have a "felt need" that isn't

being met and our feelings get hurt and we either shut down or get mad.

And I probably don't have to spend much time describing to you the crop of negative things that grow in relationships where unrealistic or false expectations flourish...Things like misunderstanding, hard feelings, division, pouting, bitterness, and manipulation abound...

That said, even though we all know we shouldn't do it, we still do, don't we? Even in the body of Christ, we often look to one another in unhealthy ways, trying to get the needs of our souls met.

But you know, having expectations on one another is really only a symptom of a bigger problem.

When our expectation rests on anything or anyone other than Christ, it just reveals the fact that we haven't fully comprehended the reality that we are dead and that Christ is our Life and that everything we need pertaining to life and godliness is found in Him....

So if you are like me and are constantly being made aware of the fact that you have expectations in the wrong realm or on other people, while that's not an ideal position to be in, it's not the end of the world either because remember, the Holy Spirit is alive within us and His job is to continually reveal the measure of Christ to us so we can know the way things already are, so we can walk in it.

There's nothing waiting to be done. It's all been finished. The big question is are we going to let the Truth about what's been done find a home in us or are we going to resist it? That's what you and I need to come face to face with every day.

Christ accomplished what He set out to do and He's given us the Holy Spirit to reveal what He did,....The only thing we need to

have is a heart that is willing to be shown what He's done. As we let Him show us the Truth, our hearts will be transformed and our expectations will begin to line up with the truth.

And if YOU do that and I do that --- if we all grow in the truth together-- we'll find ourselves coming into a common view and purpose and we'll start living according to the of who we are in God-- a many-membered body but one who's walking in the life and purpose and under the direction of a single Head.

When I broke my foot, the rest of my body compensated for what was lacking, but it wasn't because my broken foot had an expectation on my body for help.

The kind of help and how much help my foot needed was "determined" by my head/brain. The only job my foot had was to trust my brain and rest in it's provision, whether it felt like I was doing a good job of providing for!

And in the same way, the other parts of my body operated in an understanding that originated in my brain, but it wasn't just intended to meet the needs of just my foot, it was meant for the life and good of my body as a whole.

The "vision" for my foot came down from my brain and all the members of my body were made aware of my brain's expectation for my body and my foot. In a round about way, it's like all my foot needed to do was to rest and trust in my brain is aware of it's needs...In fact, even though it didn't realize it, my foot already HAS been given everything it needs, by virtue of being connected to a body that shares the life of the head!

Is this too obscure? :)

The body of Christ shares the One Life of Christ, but faith needs to work in each of us so we can start to see things the same way,

from God's perspective. When we do, the "felt needs" of our hearts will find their fullness in Christ as He becomes the measure by which all things are defined. And once our hearts are full we can stop expecting people to fill us up.

So that's why Paul tells us not to lie to one another. And why he says it's so important that we speak the truth in love to one another. It's because hearing and then receiving the truth is what's going to cause Christ's Body to grow up in all things, into Him who is the Head.

And as His Truth works in each of us, the many not-so-great expectations we have on each other will begin to fall away because we will be finding that Christ alone is our sole-- and our soul's, expectation.

We just didn't know it.