



Running Rabid

Balancing the *passion to pursue* with the *pressure to produce*.

The Pressure of Expectations

The dreams of little boys: soldiers, pilots, and kings

A pastor friend of mine and I were enjoying a BBQ lunch at Carl's BBQ in Cypress, Texas back in 2005 (if you have never been there, you need to make a trip as it likely has the best BBQ on the planet). We were discussing various topics when our conversation drifted towards his observations on what made people fulfilled and happy versus what made them miserable. His observation, one that I consider quite astute, was that the primary driver in people's unhappiness is related to "unfulfilled expectations". As I think back to that discussion and my own observations, I am inclined to believe my friend hit the nail on the head.

As Christians we are not immune from the disappointments that plague mankind. In Matthew 5 even Jesus noted that *rain falls on the just and the unjust*. However, the difference for Christians should be rooted in our understanding that we are not in control of our destinies; that is God's department. All of us have at one time or another experienced unfulfilled expectations. Some of them are related to dreams that never came to fruition, while others relate to catastrophic events outside our control. At times it is very difficult to understand why life works as it does, but the great solace for the Believer is that nothing happens outside the control of God and that He has plans for each of us.

Mental disorders are common in the United States and internationally. An estimated 26.2 percent of Americans ages 18 and older, or approximately one in four adults, suffer from a diagnosable mental disorder in a given year. When applied to the 2004 U.S. Census residential population estimate for ages 18 and older, this figure translates to 57.7 million people.¹ Mood disorders include major depressive disorders, dysthymic disorders, and bipolar disorders. Further, approximately 20.9 million American adults, or about 9.5 percent of the U.S. population age 18 and older in a given year, have a mood disorder. The median age of onset for mood disorders is 30 years. Depressive disorders often co-occur with anxiety disorders and substance abuse.

Although I in no way want to minimize the severity of mental disorders, I cannot help but think that at the core of many of these disorders are unfulfilled expectations or consequences of people who were cruel to others because *life had not worked out for them*. How many of us have either known or experienced abuse from men who were miserable and took out their frustrations on their children and wives? Across the United States there are literally thousands of little boys and girls who will go to bed wondering if there is any hope and how the world could be such a cruel and miserable place.

Unlike non-Believers, who neither have a hope for the future nor an understanding that God is ultimately in control, followers of Jesus can call on the name of the Lord and trust in His plan for our lives. This does not imply the life of the Believer is easy, but there is great comfort in knowing that God loves us deeply and wants nothing more than to have a strong relationship with us.

¹ http://www.thekimfoundation.org/html/about_mental_ill/statistics.html

As Believers there are at least three possible responses to dealing with unfulfilled expectations. Two listed below are rooted in what could be considered “acceptable, Biblically-based responses”, while one is provided as an option just to *keep things real*. Let’s admit it, there are times when we know what we are doing is wrong and have attitudes that are clearly not in line with God’s plan for our lives.

1. **CLOSED DOOR OPTION.** This option is when we have exhausted all resources and come to the conclusion that God has closed the door. By this point you have done everything you can from praying, spending time in God’s Word, and seeking the wise counsel of fellow Brothers and Sisters in Christ. As hard as it is to admit it, there are times when this option brings relief in that God has clearly communicated His plans to you by closing a door. It is time to move on to the fact that God has other plans for you.
2. **STAY THE COURSE OPTION.** In many regards this is the toughest of all options as it requires perseverance, sometimes beyond description. I heard it said many years ago that when we are praying, God provides three answers: YES, NO, or WAIT A WHILE. This is “wait a while” option. In my life I have observed that God often has me wait for at least one of three reasons (sometimes a combination of all three). First, He wants to find out how badly I want something. If it is serious to my heart it will be reflected in my passion, prayers, and perseverance. Secondly, God needs to refine some characteristics in my life that would not result with an immediate “yes”. I have learned this is often the case for me, as it might be for you. The third one, and one very important in the grand scheme of things, is that God wants to communicate to me that He is in charge and I am not! For some of us that it a very tough realization.
3. **BAD ATTITUDE.** This is the “let’s be honest with ourselves” option. As humans we gravitate towards either developing a hard heart when things do not go our way or the other extreme that involves just wanting to give up. At times it is difficult to not move toward these extremes, especially when things have gone very wrong.

The bottom line in all of this discussion is that God loves us very, very much. As much as you love your family, God lives us infinitely more. I will admit that is a tough one to fully comprehend, but one I completely believe. Sometimes after everyone in our house has gone to sleep, I go upstairs to check on Aaron. He is currently in the first grade and is the “apple of my eye”. As I kiss his little head and tuck him in, I am reminded every time at how much God loves you and me. This is huge and something we should never forget.

Questions for the Week

1. Read Proverbs 16:3. What does it mean for us to “commit our plans to the Lord”? Think of an example, if you have one, of a time when you committed something to the Lord.
2. Read Ecclesiastes 3:1-22. What does it mean to you that God has ordained “seasons” in our lives? How would you describe the season in which you are currently residing?
3. Consider the “ups” and “downs” in your life. If appropriate, think back to your childhood and some of the experiences that have contributed to who you are today. The context of this question relates to “expectations”.
 - a. What has been the great disappointment you have faced?
 - b. What has been a source of great joy in your life?
4. Are there any areas in your life where God is bringing “refinement” through unanswered prayers and unfulfilled expectations?