Great Expectations for Your Marriage
Day 1 of 5

Guest: Dennis Rainey
From the series: Starting Your Marriage Right
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[Begin taped segment.]

Jenny: Dear Mom, I’m just writing again to thank you and Dad for the beautiful wedding. It was everything we hoped and dreamed it would be. Chad and made it home on Thursday. I tried calling a couple of times, but you didn’t answer. What are you guys doing? Anyway, isn’t e-mail great? Write me back, okay? Our honeymoon was dreamy. We walked on the beach and talked for hours. Chad even cooked dinner for me one night. I’ll tell you the details when I come home … I mean, when I see you and Dad next weekend, if that’s okay. Oh, is it okay for me and Chad to come over next weekend?

You know how you warned me that marriage can have its bumps? Well, as a now-married woman, I’m just going to have to disagree with you. Mom, Chad is wonderful. We never fight. Tell Dad that Chad is different; he’s kind and understanding and he wants to talk about what I want to talk about. Oh, and tell Dad that Chad does, too, let me hold the remote control, sometimes.

You know, Mom, marriage isn’t that much different than dating, except that now we’re together all the time. Well, there are a few differences, but Chad says he’s just fine with my favorite flannel pajamas and my electric blanket. I think he means it, too.

Well, got to go. Chad’s taking me on a surprise date tonight.

Love you forever, Jenny

Jenny: Hi, Baby!

Chad: Hey, Honey Bear, you ready to go?

Jenny: I’m ready, but what’s the surprise? Where are we going?

Chad: Check it out! Arena football tickets, 40-yard line!

Jenny: Arena football? Chad!
Chad: You said you like sports.

Jenny: I wanted to go out to eat!

Chad: Well, they’ve got corndogs and stuff there.

Jenny: I don’t want to go to a stinky arena …

[End taped segment.]


You know, I think there is something that is common to most young couples, something they experience during the first few weeks and months, years of their marriage. Do you know what it is?

Dennis: I’ve got an idea, but I don’t know exactly what you’re thinking.

Bob: I’m thinking this: “Surprise!!” Do you know what I mean?

Dennis: [Laughing] I do.

Bob: The first few years of marriage you go through the engagement period, you know one another, you get along so well, everything is just-it’s just going to be wonderful.

Dennis: You’re saying that no amount of preparation can fully equip them for handling all the adjustments that they’re going to face in marriage.

Bob: There are just a lot of surprises in the early years.

Dennis: There really are, and I want to read a verse that I don’t know that I’ve ever heard another person apply to a newly married couple starting out their relationship together, but Proverbs, chapter 13, verse 12, is a very familiar verse. “Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but desire fulfilled is a tree of life.”

Now think of the contrast there. Illness, sickness [chuckles] contrasted with a tree of life … fruit bearing, enjoyment, shade, comfort, sturdiness … all of the things that
accompany a tree … it’s important that a newly married couple fulfill their hopes and dreams. If they don’t, the opposite of that is hope deferred or unmet expectations.

**Bob:** Everybody goes into marriage with lots of hopes, lots of dreams, and yet there is a wake-up call at some point where you go, “I never knew this about you, I didn’t think you’d act this way, you do things differently than you used to when we were dating.” And we have to begin to make those subtle adjustments in order to make a marriage, make a relationship work.

**Dennis:** That’s right, and the longer we remain single, I think, the more expectations we bring into the marriage relationship. I think our expectations when we’re younger … 18, 19, 20, and so forth … well, those expectations are idealized, but I don’t think we have the number of them that we accumulate in our 20s. And I brought an illustration today to show to our radio listeners. And I have in my hand here …

**Bob:** You’ve been down to the hardware store, haven’t you?

**Dennis:** I’ve been down to the hardware store. I have a yardstick, and let’s say that this yardstick, 36 inches long, represents the expectations that a woman or a man brings into a marriage relationship. And I think what begins to happen is the following.

**Bob:** You just broke it.

**Dennis:** I just broke off two pieces. The first one, well, it’s between the 31 and the 32 …

**Bob:** Uh-huh.

**Dennis:** … and the second was around 27-1/2.

**Bob:** You’re breaking off about 5, 6 inches at a time.

**Dennis:** I’m saying that expectations begin to get whittled down until you’re left with a
few expectations.

**Bob:** It’s about a foot of them there.

**Dennis:** Yeah, there’s about 9-1/2 inches of expectations there.

Now I want to ask you a question, Bob. I’ve got another yardstick here that’s fully in place. This is … this one’s not …

**Bob:** It’s solid.

**Dennis:** … not broken. What do you call the difference between the broken yardstick, the 9-1/2 inches that’s in my left hand, and the 36-inch yardstick that’s in my right hand? What do you call the difference between these two?

**Bob:** I’d call it about 26-1/2 inches is what I’d call it [laughter].

**Dennis:** Good math, good math. What you’d call this is failure or unmet expectation, or what I would call the unmet expectation syndrome, and this syndrome occurs to every newly married couple.

**Bob:** This is where you take the difference between what you thought things were going to be …

**Dennis:** The 36 inches …

**Bob:** Right, and the reality that you’re living with.

**Dennis:** The 9-1/2 inches you’re left with. Here’s the syndrome. The first thing that happens is we have high expectations. That will result at some point in the relationship of unmet expectation. That gives way to disappointment, which in turn manifests itself as hurt, and can at that point turn into anger, and anger turned toward the other person … your spouse … results in punishment. And if you don’t make the necessary adjustments to your expectations early in your marriage, then I believe you’re going to end up with
just a piece of the yardstick. I don't think the way God intended it was for us to end up with only a few inches of the yardstick. I think we were intended to have hope and expectations in the marriage relationship, but it has to be done in a healthy way.

I’ve got three points I want to make quickly about expectations. First of all, expectations in a marriage relationship are not wrong, but they’ve got to be kept under control and managed, I believe, biblically. We really have to bring what our desires of our hearts are before the scriptures and make sure we’re not just being selfish. Some people have expectations so high that frankly they’re running in conflict with the scripture and they are simply not going to be met. That really leads me to the second one. All of your expectations will not be met in a marriage. I believe some expectations can only be met by God himself, and frankly, this is a big concern of mine for newly marrieds who are starting out or for singles. I think they are expecting out of marriage what God intended us to only expect from him.

**Bob:** They are expecting their mate to meet needs that the Lord intends to meet himself, right?

**Dennis:** Exactly. The third thing I want you to know about expectations is some of your expectations will never be met, and there are some reasons for that. Number one, your spouse may not be capable; or secondly, some of your expectations may be unreal. They literally may be too lofty, too high for another person. Early in our marriage, Bob, I remember I wanted Barbara to go hunting and fishing with me. Now she did that when we dated. It was no sweat.

**Bob:** She loved it, didn’t she?

**Dennis:** Yeah.

**Bob:** Yeah. [Chuckles.]

**Dennis:** And you know, you’ve got to – early in the marriage you’d realize what happened to these dates where we went fishing together, you know? Suddenly it became too cold outside.
Bob: Uh-huh.

Dennis: I can promise you this: Barbara and I are 28 into the process. We have a wonderful, mellow relationship that is— it’s just like a glove that fits the hand. I really enjoy this season of our marriage. But you know what? She’s still not going hunting or fishing with me.

Now what do you do with that expectation? You can focus on it, you can be disappointed by it, you can feel hurt by it, you can get angry, you can become resentful, and you can begin to punish the other person. I promise you it’s not going to lead to a harmonious marriage that is filled with oneness and peace. You have to learn how to manage those expectations and you need to know how to deal with unmet expectations because it’s not a matter of if they will occur; it’s a matter of how you’re going to respond.

Real quickly, four ways I think you ought to deal with unmet expectations. Number one, a commitment to love and forgiveness. Your marriage is never going to outgrow its need for massive doses of forgiveness.

A second thing that’s important in responding to unmet expectations: communication and understanding. You have to talk about it early in your marriage, you have to clarify your expectations, you have to clarify your needs, what your wants are.

Thirdly, in responding to unmet expectations, you have to develop God’s perspective of your mate and what he wants to teach you through those unmet expectations. First of all, Almighty God selected your spouse for you. That man, that woman is God’s provision, his perfect provision to meet your needs. Now some of those needs aren’t being met right now. Are you going to reject the provision because that provision is not doing it perfectly, or are you going to say, “God, by faith I accept who you have provided for me on the basis of who you are, that you know what you’re doing, and that you, God, have an agenda in my life that you want to accomplish through these unmet expectations.”

Bob: It doesn’t always feel good when that’s going on, but you’re right. The Bible says that when we encounter various trials, God is working out character in our lives.

Dennis: Well, you just mentioned, Bob, one of the verses I had down here. James, chapter 1, verses 2 through 8 says to count it all joy. It says respond in faith, and thirdly,
it encourages us to ask for wisdom when we encounter trials. Romans 8:28 tells us that all things work together for good. First Thessalonians 5 says to give thanks in all things. Now in the Greek, that means all ... [laughter] ... that means everything. Philippians 4:11-13 ... Paul is writing about his troubles. He said, “I’ve learned contentment regardless of my circumstances that Christ is sufficient.”

It could be that in your circumstances right now there’s an unmet expectation by your spouse where Jesus Christ is knocking at your door wanting to be your sufficiency. Romans 5 talks about how suffering and trials and difficulties and disappointment produce proven character, growth and hope. All those things come as a result of us responding by faith to God’s agenda in our lives.

And that really leads me to the fourth way we’re to respond to unmet expectations: don’t give up on your dreams. That means don’t throw away the yardstick.

Bob: Well, that’s what a lot of young couples do, Dennis. They face these expectations that are unmet, and the first thought is “I made a big mistake.” It’s like you go to the store, you thought you were buying one product, you come home and unwrap it and it’s another completely different product. And you say, “I have to go back to the store and exchange this product for another product.” And you’re saying stick with what you brought home from the store?

Dennis: I’m saying the nature of covenant love is commitment, and the thing that is different about a Christian is that they’ve made a vow that they’ve made before Almighty God that they won’t give up, that they’re not going to toss the towel, but that they are going to love that person, and in some situations, may be married to a person who is not a believer. The Bible is clear that our actions, our attitudes sanctifies; it has a cleansing impact on the other person’s life.

Unmet expectations are a reality in all relationships, and regardless of how you’ve experienced that disappointment, I believe we have a responsibility before God to respond appropriately.
Bob: You know, I've heard about families that planned for years the big trip to Disneyworld. They were going to go … or whatever … some theme park that the whole family was going to go to, and they arrive at the park only to find that it’s raining and cold and dreary. And everything they thought that amusement park vacation was going to be winds up being a bust. I think that's a picture of how some couples wind up in their first few years of marriage.

Dennis: Yeah, and you wake up and you do a little inspection of your relationship, and you have termites in your troth, termites in your vows. They’re eating away at the infrastructure of your marriage, and your disappointment is beginning to turn into disillusionment, and you’re beginning to question your commitment.

Bob, I sat down in preparation for this broadcast and the ones we’re going to do over the next couple of days, and I wrote out 25 areas where we must make adjustments, and if we don’t make the adjustments and deal with the proper expectations, I think we’re going to end up like you described. We’re going to feel like we’ve gone to Disneyland on a day it rained or maybe on a day where there was a storm that blew through, and instead of being an amusement park, instead it ends up being a place of pain, of punishment, and not at all for the reason we got married.

Bob: Yeah, for some couples it’s not just “we’re not having as much fun as we thought we’d have; for some couples, “we’re not having any fun at all,” and that's when you begin to say, “Is there a way out?”

Dennis: Yeah, and I’m saying the way to build that marriage is to eliminate that escape clause and say, “We’re not leaving. Now how do we live with one another and how do we adjust our expectations appropriately?”

Bob: You know, I remember Dr. Norm Wright being here one time, and he said that in a … in a typical marriage, it takes three to five years for couples to go through this early adjustment phase. And I remember you responding to that and saying that’s when most
couples call it quits, that’s when they bail out, is in the three- to five-year window. So there’s a juncture here where husbands and wives have got to realize this is where we are. We’re in that adjustment phase. They both are going to have to make some concessions, aren’t they?

Dennis: Well, as we go through this list of 25 areas where we need to make adjustments, you’re going to hear several themes repeated over and over and over again as I talk about how to respond to these.

Bob: Are you going to read through the whole list for us?

Dennis: Well, I wasn’t planning on it today, but I’ll tell you what we’ll do. We’ll post it on the website, and I will …

Bob: This is what we’re going to talk about over the next couple of days.

Dennis: … yeah, and I will … I will read through it here quickly. Now keep in mind these are adjustments that we’ve got to make.

First of all, finances. That’s a biggie.

Number two: relating to the opposite sex after we’re married. Now I’ve got some things to say about that.

Loneliness. Most people don’t think loneliness is an issue in marriage. After we get married it’s a huge issue.

Bob: Okay.

Dennis: In-laws demand adjustments.

Number five: romance and affection. I didn’t say sex. Romance and affection.

Bob: Why are you looking at me like that? [Chuckles.]

Dennis: Number six … because I know how a man thinks, and this is what a woman is expecting here … number six: spiritual growth together. This is huge. I’ve got some
statistics on this that we’ve found from our family needs survey that we’ve taken all across the country in more than a hundred churches. This is a massive area of need today and one where many couples are not making the right adjustments.

Number seven: roles of husband and wife. You know something about this. You wrote your book, “The Christian Husband,” to help equip men to know what their job description really is.

Number eight: communication. [Chuckles.] Oh, man, that’s all capital letters there.

**Bob:** [Chuckles.]

**Dennis:** Number nine: values and lifestyle choices. We’re different and nowhere does it come than when we start talking about our values.

Number ten: trials and suffering.

Number eleven: the choice of where we go to church. That’s massive.

**Bob:** Uh-huh, that’s big.

**Dennis:** Number twelve: differences. This is everything from male and female differences to backgrounds, and preferences, and I’m going to talk about the four ways you can load a dishwasher.

**Bob:** [Chuckles] Okay.

**Dennis:** All right?

**Bob:** All right.

**Dennis:** There are four ways to load a dishwasher. You’re going to hear it first right here on “FamilyLife Today.”

Thirteen: travel. That’s when your spouse or you begin to hit the road. That brings enormous pressure and brings great adjustments to a marriage relationship.

Fourteen: debt ... D-E-B-T. Oh, that’s huge. That’s massive.
Fifteen: children.

Sixteen: entertainment.

**Bob:** Choices you make about entertainment? What you’re going to see, what you won’t?

**Dennis:** Managing the media monster. That’s a huge one.

Seventeen: weekends.

**Bob:** Right.

**Dennis:** Some of our biggest fights came on the weekends early in our marriage.

Eighteen: traditions, holidays, celebrations.

Nineteen: how you resolve conflict.

Twenty: work, career.

Twenty-one: vacations.

**Bob:** What you do with them.

**Dennis:** Oh, yeah.

Twenty-two: priorities and the schedule monster.

Twenty-three: sex. You knew it would make the list.

Twenty-four: the roles of becoming a mother and a father.

**Bob:** Who does what there.

**Dennis:** That’s exactly right. If the role of becoming a husband or wife is a big adjustment, I promise you this one catches a lot of these young couples off guard.

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And number twenty-five is the biggest of all, and I’m not going to share it today.

**Bob:** [Chuckles] It’s … well, it’s on the website so folks can go see it on the website.

**Dennis:** I’m going to ask them to leave it blank on the website.

**Bob:** Oh! [Chuckles.]

**Dennis:** I’m going to make them listen to the end to get number twenty-five, but it is the thing that causes the biggest adjustment in the marriage relationship.

**Bob:** We’re going to talk through these 25 over the next few days, and you really deal with all of these at different points in your book, “Starting Your Marriage Right.” This is a devotional for couples for the early years of marriage. You’ve put it together around 52 chapters so that once a week a couple can sit down on a date night, read a chapter together and answer the questions at the end and begin to make some of these adjustments and modify their expectations over it.

**Dennis:** Right, and all this week we’re going to be challenging couples to do two things. In fact, I’m going to challenge the singles to listen carefully because you can learn a ton just by eavesdropping in on these issues and beginning to properly align your expectations. It’s hard to have right expectations as a single person, but we’re going to challenge engaged couples and newly married couples to go through this material, either as a couple or with a mentor. Find a couple who will take you through this material over the first 12 months, 24 months of your marriage. I’m telling you, it will be some of the best investments you ever make.

And then we’re going to challenge couples who’ve been married, I don’t know, five to eight to ten years or so … we’d like to challenge you to consider adopting a newly married couple, picking up this book and just taking these chapters, and maybe tossing the book in their lap and just saying to them, “Pick a chapter you’d like for us to discuss next month,” and then meet with them once a month for a
year, maybe two years, and just talk about some of these adjustments we’re discussing here. All of these 25, including the one I didn’t mention, are in the book, but you’ll have to hunt for number 25.

**Bob:** If you’d like to get a copy of the book, *Starting Your Marriage Right*. You can go to our web site FamilyLifeToday.com and the information is available there. Again whether you are a newly married or you know someone who is about to be married, this is a great investment you can make in their marriage. I love your idea about adopting a younger couple and helping them to walk through this material.

Again the book is available from us at FamilyLifeToday.com. You can order online if you’d like or call us at 1-800-FL-TODAY. 1-800-358-6329. For those listeners who have been married for a couple of years already and they are thinking we don’t need that book we encourage you to get a copy of Dennis and Barbara Rainey’s daily devotional called *Moments With You*. Something that every married couple can spend to in together on a daily basis to help you to grow closer to one another and closer in your walk with Christ. Again the information for both these books can be found at FamilyLifeToday.com or you can call 1-800-FL-TODAY. When you get in touch with us someone on our team will let you know how you can have the resources sent to you.

I think that many of our listeners are aware of the fact that this month we have had friends of the ministry who have made available a very generous matching gift opportunity. All month long we have been encouraging listeners if you’re able to help us take full advantage of this matching gift we would love to hear from you. We want to thank those of you who have already contacted us because today is a holiday if you wanted to make a donation to FamilyLifeToday you’d want to do that online you want to do that at FamilyLifeToday.com. These donations this month are being matched on a dollar for dollar basis up to a total of $356,000. We’re so grateful to those of you who have already responded. If you can help with a donation just go to FamilyLifeToday.com make your donation online and let me say thanks in advance for your financial support. These are challenging economic times for all of us and we appreciate those of you who
have rallied to help support the ministry here in the month of May.

Tomorrow we are going to dive in to the list of difficult adjustments couples face during the early years of marriage. If you know someone who is a newlywed or about to be call them and invite them to listen to tomorrow’s program.

I want to thank our engineer today, Keith Lynch, and our entire broadcast production team. On behalf of our host, Dennis Rainey, I’m Bob Lepine. We’ll see you next time for another edition of “FamilyLife Today.”

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