

THE EXPECTATION GAP

PART 1: WHEN LOVE FEELS FAR

WIN

To pay attention to the stories we tell ourselves and begin to distinguish the lies we believe from what's actually true.

CONNECT

When was a time your expectations didn't match your experience (i.e., a vacation, a hobby, or even a meal)? What happened, and how did you react in the moment?

- Laughed it off
- Got frustrated
- Blamed myself
- Blamed someone else
- Pretended it didn't bother me

LEARN

Before watching the video together and discussing the questions provided, we suggest taking a few moments to pray. Here's a simple prayer you can use:

Heavenly Father,

Help us become more aware of the thoughts and assumptions that shape how we see you and how we see ourselves. Give us clarity to recognize what is true and what isn't. Amen.

After praying, watch the video for Part 1.

APPLY

After the video, discuss the following questions as a group:

1. When you think about your inner dialogue, would you say it's mostly:
 - Encouraging
 - Neutral
 - Critical
 - Depends on the day

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2. Steve mentioned his “Story-I-Tell-Myself Committee” that includes these voices:

Family-of-Origin Propagandist	You received messages like these growing up: “Don’t complain. It’s not that bad. Others have it worse. Handle it yourself.”
Childhood Agreements Officer	You made an agreement with yourself: “Never let that happen again. Don’t ever admit weakness. Don’t admit that you’re hurt.”
Soldiers	They’re on high alert and keep you hyper vigilant and highly suspicious.
Inner Critic	It speaks up anytime you fall short, filling the gap with shame.

Which of these voices feels most familiar to you? How does that voice usually show up in your life?

3. Have you ever found it easier to believe that God loves others than to believe he loves you? Share why.
4. The first gap Steve mentioned is, I believe God loves me, but I don’t feel it. If you’re familiar with this gap, where have you noticed it?
- In how you pray (or don’t pray)?
 - In how you handle failure?
 - In how you imagine God’s opinion of you?
 - Somewhere else?

5. Read **1 John 3:19–20** aloud:

This is how we know that we belong to the truth and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence: If our hearts condemn us, we know that God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.

What difference could it make to really believe that God knows everything and that he loves you—specifically and personally?

6. What’s one thing you can do to pause and relax into God’s love this week?

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PRAY

Take prayer requests, then close your time in prayer. Here's an example you can use:

Heavenly Father,

Thank you that you know us fully and love us completely. Give us wisdom to recognize the lies we believe and help us live in the truth that we are loved, not because we've earned it, but because of Jesus. Amen

BEFORE NEXT TIME

This week, when you notice the inner critic or another “committee member” getting loud, be sure to:

1. **Name it:** “That’s the critic talking.”
2. **Ask:** “Does this line up with what God actually says about me?”
3. **Replace** it with one sentence of truth about God’s love for you.

To explore this topic further, read chapters 1-4 of *The Expectation Gap: The Tiny, Vast Space between Our Beliefs and Experience of God* by Steve Cuss.

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