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“Expectation Frustration”

Matthew 11:1-19

Pastor Gary Hamrick

Many times in life we are disappointed when things don't go according to what we expected. When that happens with God - when he doesn't do what we had hoped or expected - it can lead to a frustration with God. In Matthew 11 we see this happening with John the Baptist when he found himself in prison and God seemingly ignored his situation. John began to question whether Jesus really was the Messiah. Have you ever struggled with frustration or discouragement because God didn't do what you had hoped he would do? It's not uncommon. God can handle our discouragement, and the fact is that he is the one who can help us through it.

Historical Background

1. Pastor Gary said, “Any time, in any situation, when what you desire does not match what was delivered, you have expectation frustration. [This is what happens when] something didn't happen, the way you thought it would happen, something didn't happen like you hoped it would turn out. ... It might be that what was delivered was [unreasonable] or unsatisfactory or a combination of both. ... When you have in mind something that should happen, and it doesn't happen, it can be very disappointing. ... It's bad enough when [we] experience [disappointing things in life], but it is much worse when it has to do with the Lord. ... John the Baptist [was] in prison, and he [was] second guessing the identity of Jesus that he so clearly declared from the first day that he saw [Jesus]. ... About one year after making these bold assertions, John began to wonder if Jesus really [was] the Messiah, so he sent two of his disciples [to Jesus to ask him if he was the Messiah]. ... Why would someone who so confidently asserted that Jesus [was] the Christ, the Son of God, suddenly question whether Jesus really was the promised Messiah? The answer is, [John had] expectation frustration because things [hadn't] gone according to [the way John expected them to go]. ... [John's] circumstances contributed to his frustration about Jesus.”

- a. [John 1:29, 34](#) - *"The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, 'Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!' ... '... I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God.' "*
- b. [Matthew 11:2-3](#) - *"And when John had heard in prison about the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples and said to Him, 'Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?' "*
- c. [Matthew 11:3](#) - *"... 'Are you the one who is to come, or **should we expect someone else?**' "* (1984 NIV - Emphasis added)

2. John the Baptist

- a. John was a prophet called by God before he was even conceived!¹
- b. [Luke 1:14-17](#) - *"[The angel of the Lord said to Zechariah of John], 'He will be a joy and a delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. ... he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born. He will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous - to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.' "* (1984 NIV)
- c. John was a rough, 'outdoorsy' kind of man, who never married or had children, wasn't wealthy, nor did he ever travel far from his hometown, but God raised him up just as he said he would.
- d. Pastor Gary said, "He was bold and unafraid. He was truthful and unapologetic. John the Baptist preached a message of repentance and he confronted sin wherever he saw it. All of his preparation for the arrival and announcement of Jesus [was] on the world scene. Which brings us to our story. [Whenever] you go around boldly declaring the truth as a prophet of God, as John the Baptist was, confronting sin, the unvarnished truth that often people don't want to hear, you will inevitably offend people, and John the Baptist offended people in his bold declaration of the truth. And among those he offended was Herod Antipas, [who was] also known as Herod the Tetrarch. [He] was the Roman-appointed ruler over the province of Galilee [region] at this particular time in [Israel's history]. John the Baptist offended Herod Antipas because John boldly confronted Herod about the fact that Herod had stolen his brother's wife and [had] taken her to be his own wife. ... [The reason] John dispatched two of his disciples [was] because John was in prison. ... He ended up in prison for doing what God had called him to do. ... John's mind [went] where most of our minds go when we have time on our hands: to dark places. ... John started to think about his unpleasant circumstances. ... [He wondered], 'Where is God in all of this?' ... 'Where is Jesus?' ... 'Why does Jesus rescue other people but not me?' ... [Why does

¹ [Luke 1:5-25](#)

my situation seem to go unnoticed?'] ... [There's no doubt that when this happens] you get discouraged, [and] you get depressed. ... It was not on his list to be in prison for doing God's work. [His circumstances contributed to his questioning who Jesus was, etc.] ... [John had expectation frustration.]”

- i. [Luke 3:18–20](#) – *“And with many other exhortations he preached to the people. But Herod the tetrarch, being rebuked by him concerning Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, and for all the evils which Herod had done, also added this, above all, that he shut John up in prison.”*
- ii. The ancient historian Josephus wrote that John was imprisoned ² at Machaerus, approximately one year before he was beheaded.

Overcoming Expectation Frustration

3. Look for what God is doing rather than for what he is not doing.
 - a. Jesus did not defend himself or explain himself.
 - b. [Matthew 11:4–5](#) – *“Jesus answered [John's disciples] and said to them, ‘Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: the blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them.’”*
 - c. We often lose sight of the wonderful things God **is doing** because we are focused on what God **isn't doing**. (Emphasis added)
 - d. Jesus reminded John of the many wonderful things he **was doing**. (Emphasis added)
 - e. Pastor Gary said, “Our situation does not define who God is. [Our situation] is not a commentary on God's faithfulness or lack of [faithfulness]. He is faithful. He is just. He is true. He is merciful. He is loving in all of his ways, and just because we don't sense that in whatever our circumstance is it does not change that immutable character of God. He is still God whether in 'my moment' it feels like it or not; he is still God. And he's up to things that [we] may not always understand. ... We have to be careful when we get in [these kinds of slumps] that we stop and say, ‘Okay, wait a minute; what are the many wonderful things God is doing?’ We need to get our eyes off of the one or two things that God [isn't doing] and look at what God is doing. It's human nature to focus on what is negative instead of what is positive. ... Even when God is not doing everything that we think he should do, he is still doing something that we need him to do. ... Sometimes we have to... cling to the truth that God is at work in seen and unseen ways even when it doesn't add up to what we expect.”

² <https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-sites-places/biblical-archaeology-sites/machaerus-beyond-the-beheading-of-john-the-baptist/>

4. Fall forward not away and you will be blessed.
- a. **Matthew 11:6** – *“And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me.”*
 - b. **Matthew 11:6** – *“Blessed is the man who does not **fall away** on account of me.”* (1984 NIV – Emphasis added)
 - c. Pastor Gary said, “[Why] would someone be offended at Jesus? ... [The answer is,] when he doesn’t do what you expect him to do. That’s when get offended with each other too, by the way. ... There is a blessing for all who do not *“fall away on account of [Jesus]. ... [We need to lean into and press into the Lord when things don’t make sense, not run from him. We typically retreat from someone who disappoints us or causes us pain.] ... People tragically fall away from the Lord [when they think he has let them down, not intervened, or helped in various situations]. ... Unmet expectations with God or people cause us to run away from our source of disappointment. But the problem is that when we do that with God, we actually are denying ourselves the very help that we need that can only come from [the Lord]. ... We can become miserable, [angry, or bitter] and the only one [who] can help us and heal us in our anger and our bitterness is the very one we are running from. We are not going to find that healing on our own or in ourselves. ... We need to defer to the one who is all-wise, all-knowing, all-loving, and run to him even when it’s uncomfortable.”*
 - i. The Greek work for fall away is skandalizo,³ which is where we get the English word scandalize.
 - d. Jesus commended John the Baptist’s ministry; he didn’t condemn John or his disciples for asking this question.
 - i. **Matthew 11:7–15** – *“As they departed, Jesus began to say to the multitudes concerning John: ‘What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Indeed, those who wear soft clothing are in king’s houses. But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet. For this is he of whom it is written: “Behold, I send My messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before You.’ Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of is greater than he. And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is to come. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!’ ”*

5. Remember that God’s ways are not our ways.

- a. **Matthew 11:16–19** – *“But to what shall I liken this generation? It is like children*

³ <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong=G4624&t=NKJV>

sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their companions, and saying: 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we mourned for you, and you did not lament.' For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, "He has a demon." The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, "Look, a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!" But wisdom is justified by her children.' "

- i. The playing of a flute refers to a wedding celebration, and mourning refers to a funeral.
 - ii. The meaning is that a person is expected to act a certain way in specific times.
- b. Pastor Gary said, "What Jesus [was] saying is in this text that sometimes adults are like little children [who are] playing a game, expecting God to act one way in this situation and another way in that situation. And they even went so far in this day to accuse John of having a demon and to accuse Jesus of being a drunk. Why? Well, because they weren't doing things the way that they thought it should be done. [They saw that] Jesus was hanging around with tax collectors and sinners, [so] he must be a drunk. ... [They saw the way John preached], so he must have a demon. ... [It comes down to] Jesus not performing the way they expect him to perform. ... We can't put these expectations on God, and then if he doesn't do what we expect him to do, then we just get disappointed. How about if we just defer to God, trust him, realize that his ways are not our ways? ... We need to get this in our souls. ... We need to humble ourselves and realize [that] God understands it all, God sees the big picture, [and] we only see a tiny [part]. We can't bring discouragement on ourselves... because God doesn't perform the way we expect [him to]."
- i. **Isaiah 55:8-9** - "*For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,' says the LORD. 'For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.'* "
- c. Pastor Gary read a story told by Max Lucado about a woodcutter. ⁴

Discussion Questions

1. Read **Matthew 11:1-19** to provide a foundation for your Bible study time.
2. Read and discuss Pastor Gary's opening remarks and the associated Scriptures concerning expectation frustration. (See #1 above)
3. Provide an overview of John the Baptist. (See #2a, #2b, and #2c above)

⁴ <https://maxlucado.com/woodcutters-wisdom-and-other-favorite-stories/>

4. Read and discuss Pastor Gary's comments about the boldness of John the Baptist's way of denouncing sin, and Herod Antipas and Herodias in particular. (See #2d above)
5. Allow the people in your group to share experiences about times when they were focused on the things God wasn't doing and completely missed the things God was doing. (See #3 above)
6. Read and discuss Pastor Gary's comments about the fact that our situation, struggles, or season of trial or difficulty are not commentaries on God's faithfulness. (See #3e above)
7. Allow the people in your group to share their experiences about times when they were disappointed and/or discouraged about a specific situation and instead of going to the Lord for help they retreated from him.
8. Read and discuss Pastor Gary's remarks about the meaning of [Matthew 11:6](#). (See #4c above)
9. Read and discuss Pastor Gary's comments about the meaning of [Matthew 11:16-19](#). (See #5b above)
10. Read the story Pastor Gary shared about the wood cutter. (Use link provided to go to Max Lucado's website)
11. Close your meeting by allowing the Holy Spirit to lead your time of prayer.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New King James Version (NKJV)