

What did you Expect?



Redeeming the Realities of Marriage

PAUL DAVID TRIPP

“Noël and I listened to most of this book driving in the car! Wise words. Authentic experience. Provocative application. Turned a long trip into a fruitful two-person marriage seminar.”

John Piper, Chancellor of Bethlehem College and Seminary,
Minneapolis, Minnesota

“When Paul Tripp teaches, preaches, or writes he does so through the lens of the gospel. In *What Did You Expect?*, Paul faithfully and brilliantly lets the gospel bear its weight on the messiness and beauty of marriage. I, personally, found the book to be helpful, and we use it extensively at The Village.”

Matt Chandler, Lead Pastor of Teaching, The Village Church,
Dallas, Texas

“The reason *What Did You Expect?* is so powerful is not because Paul Tripp is a marriage expert with tips and tricks to fix your problems, it’s because his teaching is drenched in the gospel and the Word of God. This honest book will help you see yourself and your spouse in a new light as it shows you who Jesus is and how to connect his redeeming grace to the daily realities of your marriage. Singles and engaged couples will benefit from it, too.”

Joshua Harris, Former Senior Pastor, Covenant Life Church,
Gaithersburg, Maryland

“At once deeply theological and practically relevant, this is one of the top books on marriage I have ever read. Paul Tripp allows readers to examine marriage through a biblical lens so that we understand how God can graciously heal our hurting homes. As a pastor, I will implore our people to read this book as soon as it is available.”

Chris Brauns, author, *Unpacking Forgiveness*; Pastor, The Red Brick Church, Stillman Valley, Illinois

“What I’ve come to expect from Paul Tripp is consistently deep, transparent, biblical, wise, practical, gospel-driven counsel. Rather than muddying the water with self-focused strategies designed to meet our ever-multiplying needs, Paul, as the seasoned soul-physician he is, correctly diagnoses our problems and provides the cure—humble faith in Jesus Christ. I wasn’t disappointed. You won’t be either.”

Elyse M. Fitzpatrick, counselor; speaker; author, *Give Them Grace*

“Paul Tripp brings many years of counseling, growth as a husband, and deepening discovery of the liberating power of grace to this realistic and challenging guide to God’s engagement in redeeming marriages that are threatened by complacency, misunderstanding, and selfishness. The Bible’s message of the humbling and healing power of Christ’s mercy and the powerful presence of his Spirit in our homes comes through loud and clear. The daily practicality of gospel doctrine is made crystal clear by Tripp’s transparency about his personal missteps in becoming a Christ-reflecting husband and the many examples of couples who have discovered that they are sinners married to sinners. But that the third, divine Party in marriage gives hope and change when unrealistic expectations are shattered and when we confront our sin. But be warned: Tripp’s diagnostic questions are downright uncomfortable. Even those with strong marriages by God’s grace will find their deep tendencies toward self-coronation challenged!”

Dennis E. Johnson, Professor of Practical Theology, Westminster Seminary, California

“Paul Tripp issues a challenge for couples to roll up their sleeves, get to work, and do what it takes to build a God-honoring relationship. He presents six commitments for couples to make, and contained within each is insightful, practical, and effective advice on how to construct a loving, growing, grace-soaked marriage.”

Mary A. Kassian, Professor of Women’s Studies, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary; author, *Girls Gone Wise in a World Gone Wild*

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There aren't many couples who are graced
by having such fine examples go
before them.

Thanks, Tedd and Margy,
for giving us a living example
of how to live in marriage
God's way.

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Preface

For some reason I seem to be drawn to write about things I'm not very good at. Marriage is a prime example. I got married at twenty and was all too sure of myself. I was convinced of my character and maturity, and I thought marriage would be easy for me. It wasn't! It didn't take long for the true selfishness and impatience of my heart to be revealed. But I worked to deny what God was clearly revealing. I fought to convince myself that I was not the problem. I got good at persuading myself and worked hard at persuading Luella, my wife, that I was right and she was wrong. But God, in his gorgeous grace, was unrelenting in his pursuit of me, and Luella was committed to being honest with me.

I was heading for disaster and I didn't even know it. Now, don't misunderstand; I wasn't a constant monster, and I really did want my marriage to Luella to work. The problem was that there were things inside me that made the kind of marriage this book is about utterly impossible. I analyzed, rationalized, criticized, and generally pointed the finger. But there was no escaping it—I was the problem. I had been surrounded by grace, grace that would not rest until I had been delivered from the one thing I could not escape by myself—me. I went down kicking and screaming, but God was gracious and Luella was patient until I began to face the one thing I had fought so hard to admit: I desperately needed to change.

Luella and I just celebrated another anniversary. When we look back, we are amazed at all that has happened, all that God has done. We love one another dearly, and we are very grateful for our years together. They have been rich and exciting. We have not experienced too many boring days. We love being with one another, and we love celebrating shared life. But there is something that we love even more. We love Jesus and his transforming grace. We love his Word and the stunning wisdom that it contains. We know our story isn't a story of marital success. No, our story is the story of two people who have been rescued by grace

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and wisdom again and again. Over and over we have been forgiven and empowered by God's grace. Over and over we have been convicted, convinced, transformed, and directed by his Word.

If you could watch a video of our life together, you would soon realize that we have not "arrived." We are still being rescued by that same wisdom and grace. God is still working to reveal and win our hearts. We wish we could say that the war of love is over in our marriage, but we can't. Love of self still gets in the way of love for God and for one another. And when it does, our marriage suffers. There are still times when we have a greater trust in our instincts than we do in God's wisdom, and when we do, our marriage suffers the results of our foolishness. So, we rest in God's wisdom and grace, but we do not rest in our marriage. As long as we are two sinners living in a fallen world, there will be work to do.

Sometimes that means being willing to serve when it's the last thing we want to do. Sometimes it means being willing to listen when our instinct is to argue. Sometimes it means being willing to love, even in those moments when the other doesn't seem deserving. Sometimes it means humbly asking for forgiveness when we are tempted to argue that we were right. Sometimes it means being willing to go through a moment of tension so that truth can get on the table. Sometimes it means being willing to overlook a minor offense. But there is one thing that we know for sure: as we rest in God's grace, we are called to give grace to one another. And as we celebrate God's wisdom, we must be willing to let that wisdom be our moment-by-moment guide as we relate and respond to each other.

I don't have any personal brilliance to give you. In a real way, this book is a testimony to my own rescue. I offer to you and your marriage two things: God's powerful, transforming grace and his life-rearranging wisdom. In these two things you will find hope and real change for your marriage, and as you do, you too will learn what it means to rest and work at the same time.

—Paul David Tripp
August 31, 2009

COMMITMENT 1: We will give ourselves to a regular lifestyle of confession and forgiveness.

COMMITMENT 2: We will make growth and change our daily agenda.

COMMITMENT 3: We will work together to build a sturdy bond of trust.

COMMITMENT 4: We will commit to building a relationship of love.

COMMITMENT 5: We will deal with our differences with appreciation and grace.

COMMITMENT 6: We will work to protect our marriage.

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“I just didn’t think it would be like this,” Mary said. She looked completely exhausted and defeated.

Sam just looked angry. He didn’t want to be with me talking about his marriage to Mary. In fact, if the truth be told, he didn’t want to be married to Mary. He’d had it! “Fifteen years—fifteen years!—and this is what I get?”

Mary refused to answer; she just sat there and sobbed.

“Look what my hard work gave you. No one you know lives in a house like yours. No one you know has the things I’ve provided for you. No one has had the wonderful experiences around the world that I’ve given you. But, no, it’s never enough. Mary, I’m tired of your constant complaining. I’m tired of daily criticism. I just don’t want to do this anymore, and I don’t think you do either,” Sam said, as his voice trailed off.

I looked at Sam and Mary, and I knew it had not always been like this. I’ve sat with many couples while they were in the process of considering marriage, which has often been a bit of a frustrating experience for me. No, I haven’t been frustrated because they were “madly” in love; I think it’s wonderful when a man and woman adore one another. I think it’s wonderful when they decide to spend their lives with one another. I understand that in the throes of the romance of the moment, they find it hard to concentrate on the preparatory work that needs to get done. None of this has frustrated me. I think that deep mutual affection is a beautiful thing.

Here’s what has frustrated me again and again: *unrealistic expecta-*

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tions. There—I’ve said it. I am persuaded that it is more regular than irregular for couples to get married with unrealistic expectations. Again and again I have sat with couples who simply do not seem to be taking seriously the important things the Bible has to say about what every marriage will encounter in the here and now. Unrealistic expectations always lead to disappointment.

You know this is true if you have ever looked at a vacation Web site before traveling there. No vacation site will actually look as nice and function as well as it does on its promotional site on the Internet. You inevitably end up disappointed because you started out with unrealistic expectations.

We took our family on a vacation to Disney World. We looked at that beautiful Disney literature. But we weren’t told that we would stand under a blazing sun for 90 minutes in 120-degree heat and 200-percent humidity to ride a ride that takes 33 seconds!

My son, who was at this time just a little guy, saw a ride that he wanted to go on. We walked for what seemed like forever and finally found the end of the line. We stood in line so long that my son and I had this conversation: “Dad,” he said, “why are we standing here?” I said, “There is a ride at the end of this line.” And he said, with a look of complete exhaustion, “And what ride is it?” We had been in the line so long that he had forgotten why we were standing there. Unrealistic expectations always lead to disappointment.

Using the Bible Biblically

Part of the problem is the way we use Scripture. We mistakenly treat the Bible as if it were arranged by topic—you know, the world’s best compendium of human problems and divine solutions. So when we’re thinking about marriage, we run to all the marriage passages. But the Bible isn’t an encyclopedia; it is a story, the great origin-to-destiny story of redemption. In fact, it is more than a story. It is a theologically annotated story. It is a story with God’s notes. This means that we cannot understand what the Bible has to say about marriage by looking only at the marriage passages, because there is a vast amount of biblical information about marriage not found in the marriage passages.

In fact, we could argue, to the degree that every portion of the

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Bible tells us things about God, about ourselves, about life in this present world, and about the nature of the human struggle and the divine solution, to that degree every passage in the Bible is a marriage passage. Every passage imparts to us insight that is vital for a proper understanding of the passages that directly address marriage, and every passage tells us what we should expect as we deal with the comprehensive relationship of marriage.

One of our problems is that we have not used the Bible biblically, and this has set us up for surprises we shouldn't have had.

Please Don't Mess This Up

But the unrealistic expectations have another source. It's almost as though the potential husband and wife are motivated not to hear the truth about what they will inevitably face, because they don't want anything to mess up the unfettered affection that has left them in a virtual romantic delirium. Now again, I want to say that I think that deep and mutual affection is a beautiful thing, but we must not let it motivate us to deny reality.

That dynamic is like what happens to you while you are consuming a wonderful meal of deep-fried fish and chips, which will be followed by a dessert of rich chocolate cake and ice cream. You simply have no interest in considering what this meal is doing to your heart and waistline. You do not want to discuss calories and cholesterol. You are not very motivated to consider fat and sugar content. No, you want to savor every delectable morsel. You want to consume all the fish and fries you can while they are still warm and crunchy. And no matter how full you are, you are planning to consume a hearty piece of that four-layer, double-chocolate mousse cake.

You see, in the midst of the power of premarital romance, it is very hard to get yourself to want to take a hard and honest look at reality, that is, those things that every couple will face someday, somehow, someday. You are scared that under the heat of the light of truth, your affection may evaporate. You fear that something is going to mess up the delight of what you are experiencing at the moment. What you are experiencing is one of the most powerful things a human being can experience. Love is compelling. It is motivating. It is intoxicating. It can

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command your mind and control your emotions. You sit with the one you love, considering your marriage to come, and you want what you are now feeling and experiencing to last forever. And you're not about to do anything that will mess it up.

Here's how it tends to work: you're in love and convinced that the love you are now feeling will get you through anything you might face. You simply don't want to dig up potential difficulty. You don't want to consider what could be. You don't want to let the future get in the way of what you are experiencing in the moment. Your attention span is short. You are in love, and you like it, and you are not about to let anything get in the way. You look at one another with glazed eyes, and you are sure that the powerful love you are feeling will get you through anything. You don't feel that you have much to fear. You are sure that few people have felt the love that you feel for one another. You know that other couples have problems, but you are convinced you are not like them. You are sure they must not have felt what you are feeling. You are in love, and you are sure that everything will work out right. You are simply not interested in being realistic.

Between the Already and the Not Yet

There is a way that theologians think about life in the here and now that is very helpful and can impart to us realistic expectations. Everything we say and do, everything we commit ourselves to, and every situation, location, and relationship we experience is experienced between the *already* and the *not yet*. You will never understand the things you face every day until you understand that you live in the middle. Everything in your life is shaped by what the middle is like. Perhaps you're thinking, "Paul, I don't know what you're talking about." Permit me to explain.

Knowing that you are living between the already and the not yet tells you where you are located in God's story of redemption. Stay with me; this is intensely practical. Already God has given us his Word as our guide. Already he has sent his Son to live, die, and rise again for our salvation. Already he has given us his Spirit to live within us. But the world has not yet been restored. Sin has not yet been completely eradicated. We have not yet been formed in the perfect likeness of Jesus. Suffering, sadness, and death are not yet no more.

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It is hard to live in the middle, but that is exactly where we live. We live in a world that is still sadly and terribly broken. Your marriage will not escape its brokenness. We live with flawed people. Your marriage will not be protected from those flaws. When you start unpacking what life is really like between the already and the not yet, you gain perspectives that are enormously helpful for understanding the things you need to face if you want a marriage that is wholesome and healthy in the eyes of God.

Prepared Spontaneity

You and I simply never know for sure what is coming next. Think about it: your life has not worked according to your plan. You could not have written yourself into your present situation twenty years ago. Last week didn't work according to your plan. Today won't work according to your plan. Your life is under the wise and sovereign plan of another (see Acts 17:26–27; Dan. 4:34b–35). This means that, every day, you deal with the unexpected, with things you didn't plan to have on your plate. This is surely true of your marriage. Problems come your way that have a huge impact on you and your spouse. Sickness and sin get in the way of what you thought you would be sharing together. Every marriage is required to face the unexpected. But dealing with the unexpected doesn't mean you have to be unprepared. This book is all about the principle of *prepared spontaneity*.

Now, I know it sounds like a contradiction, but it isn't. You actually can be prepared for things that you don't yet know you will face. You can be ready for things that you had no idea would come your way. In fact, I am persuaded that this is one of the main functions of Scripture. It enables us to be prepared to decide, think, desire, act, and speak well in a world in which we aren't sovereign. Here's how it works: if we have taken in what the Bible says about God, ourselves, life, sin, and the surrounding world, we are ready to deal spontaneously with things we didn't know we would be dealing with.

Again and again I have sat with couples who are surprised by what they are dealing with. Yet, when I give them an opportunity to tell their story, I am impressed to find, once again, that the things they are dealing with are the kinds of things the Bible predicts that flawed people

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in a fallen world will face. It is troubling when I sit with a wife who is shocked that her husband is a sinner or with a husband who was unprepared for the fact that his wife is tempted to be selfish.

More couples than I can number have been surprised that their marriage needs the regular rescue of grace. And because they did not take the Bible seriously, they were caught short in that moment, when the rubber meets the road in daily life, where grace was their only hope.

It's not just the prediction of *potential problems* that people haven't taken seriously, but the message of *promised provision* as well. Prepared spontaneity is not just about being aware of what you are going to face and therefore being ready to face it. It is also about knowing what you have been given so that you can face it with practical courage and hope.

This book will lay out for you a lifestyle of readiness that takes seriously the practical and life-giving wisdom perspectives of the Word of God. These wisdom insights will cause you to live prepared, even though your hand isn't on the joystick, and you don't really know what is around the next corner of your marriage.

You Can Expect the Expected

Jim got sick and had to forsake his climb up the corporate ladder. This brought stress into his marriage to Jen that he would never have anticipated. Brad and Savannah got busier and busier and quit communicating as they should, and their relationship paid the price. Brent struggled with a secret sin for years, and when Liz discovered it, it almost ended their marriage. India and Frank always seemed to be in a battle for control. It was an exhausting marriage to be a part of. Alfie and Sue never seemed to be in the same place spiritually. Jared and Sally had an infectious affection for one another, but their financial woes brought much stress to their marriage. Jung's mother pulled her into loyalty battles again and again. It caused lots of conflict between her and Kim.

There are two observations to make about all these marriages. First, none was a bad marriage. No one was about to walk out. No one had been unfaithful as yet. There had been no abuse or violence. But none was experiencing what God had in mind when he created their union in the first place. And all of them were surprised at what they had to face as a couple.

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Second, everything that each couple faced is predicted by command, principle, proposition, or perspective in the Bible. These couples should have expected the expected. If they had approached the Bible as a wonderful window onto their marriage, they would have known what to expect and not been surprised at what came their way.

So what are the essential wisdom perspectives that Scripture gives us that enable us to have realistic expectations for our marriage?

1) You Are Conducting Your Marriage in a Fallen World

Sam can't believe he has been suddenly laid-off after all these years. Julie struggles with the thought of living with a man with a chronic disease. Jared never thought he would be dealing with the things he is facing with his son. Mary feels like a prisoner in the house she loves, which is located in a neighborhood now gone bad. Sherrie struggles with the responses she has received to her biracial marriage. John often wonders why life has to be so hard.

We all face the same thing. Our marriages live in the middle of a world that does not function as God intended. Somehow, somehow, your marriage is touched every day by the brokenness of our world. Maybe it simply has to do with the necessity of living with the low-grade hassles of a broken world, or maybe you are facing major issues that have altered the course of your life and your marriage. But there is one thing for sure: you will not escape the environment in which God has chosen you to live. It is not an accident that you are conducting your marriage in this broken world. It is not an accident that you have to deal with the things you do. None of this is fate, chance, or luck. It is all a part of God's redemptive plan. Acts 17 says that he determines the exact place where you live and the exact length of your life. He knows where you live, and he is not surprised at what you are facing. Even though you face things that make no sense to you, there is meaning and purpose to everything you face. I am persuaded that understanding your fallen world and God's purpose for keeping you in it is foundational to building a marriage of unity, understanding, and love.

There is no better window on what we face in the here-and-now world in which we live than the descriptive words that the Bible uses: "grieved," "trials," and "tested" (1 Pet. 1:6-7). Now, these words

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should cause you to pause. Of all the descriptive words that Peter has at his disposal to describe what God is doing in us through the environment in which we live, it is very significant that he uses these three words. Each is instructive and interpretive. First, you will not escape the grief of life in the fallen world. That grief can be the momentary pain of a little disappointment or the long-term mourning of a significant moment of loss. The point is that, along the way, grief touches us all in little or significant ways. Second, we all face trials. We will deal with things we would never have planned for ourselves or inserted into our schedules. We will grieve because we will face difficulty that we neither anticipated nor planned. The final word brings the portrait of life in this fallen world together. The word *tested* does not mean tested like in an exam. No, it means “tempered” or “refined.”

With this word, *tested*, God tells you one of the most significant things you will ever understand about your marriage in the here and now. God decided to leave you in this fallen world to live, love, and work, because he intended to use the difficulties you face to do something in you that couldn't be done any other way. You see, most of us have a *personal happiness paradigm*. Now, it is not wrong to want to be happy, and it is not wrong to work toward marital happiness. God has given you the capacity for enjoyment and placed wonderful things around you to enjoy. The problem is not that this is a wrong goal, but that it is way too small a goal. God is working on something deep, necessary, and eternal. If he was not working on this, he would not be faithful to his promises to you. God has a *personal holiness paradigm*. Don't be put off by the language here. The words mean that God is working through your daily circumstances to change you.

In his love, he knows that you are not all that you were created to be. Even though it may be hard to admit, there is still sin inside you, and that sin gets in the way of what you are meant to be and designed to do. And, by the way, that sin is the biggest obstacle of all to a marriage of unity, understanding, and love. God is using the difficulties of the here and now to transform you, that is, to rescue you from *you*. And because he loves you, he will willingly interrupt or compromise your momentary happiness in order to accomplish one more step in the process of rescue and transformation, which he is unshakably committed to.

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When you begin to get on God's paradigm page, life not only makes sense (the things you face are not irrational troubles, but transforming tools) but immediately becomes more hopeful. There is hope for you and your marriage because God is in the middle of your circumstances, and he is using them to mold you into what he created you to be. As he does this, you not only respond to life better, but you become a better person to live with, which results in a better marriage.

This does not mean that you will stop being grieved. In fact, Jesus wept when he walked the roads of our world. But this grief is not a dark tunnel that fate has sent your way. It is a wise tool in the hands of a loving God who knows how deep your need is and wants to give you gifts of grace that will last forever.

So, somehow, someway, this fallen world and what it contains will enter your door, but you do not have to be afraid. God is with you, and he is working so that these grieving things will result in good things in and through you.

2) You Are a Sinner Married to a Sinner

I will say much more about this throughout the book, but you and I just don't get to be married to someone perfect. It seems true when you read it, but even though this seems obvious, many people get married with unrealistic expectations about who they are marrying. Here is the point: you both bring something into your marriage that is destructive to what a marriage needs and must do. That thing is called sin. Most of the troubles we face in marriage are not *intentional* or *personal*. In most marriage situations, you do not face difficulty because your spouse intentionally did something to make your life difficult. Yes, in moments of anger that may happen. But most often, what is really happening is that your life is being affected by the sin, weakness, and failure of the person you are living with. So, if your wife is having a bad day, that bad day will splash up on you in some way. If your husband is angry with his job, there is a good possibility that he will bring that anger home with him.

At some point you will be selfish. In some situation you will speak unkindly. There will be moments of jealousy, bitterness, and conflict. You will not avoid this, because you are a sinner and you are married to a sinner. If you minimize the heart struggle that both of you have car-

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ried into your marriage, here's what will happen: *you will tend to turn moments of ministry into moments of anger*. When your ears hear and your eyes see the sin, weakness, or failure of your husband or wife, it is never an accident; it is always grace. God loves your spouse, and he is committed to transforming him or her by his grace, and he has chosen you to be one of his regular tools of change. So, he will cause you to see, hear, and experience your spouse's need for change so that you can be an agent of his rescue.

Often, in these God-given moments of ministry, rather than serving God's purpose we get angry because somehow our spouse is in the way of what we want. This leads to the second thing that happens: the reason we turn moments of ministry into moments of anger is that *we tend to personalize what is not personal*. At the end of his bad day at work, your husband doesn't say to himself, "I know what I'll do. I'll take my bad day out on my wife so that her day gets as wrecked as mine." No, the trouble you are experiencing is not about you directly. Yes, it is your trouble, because this angry man is your husband. But what you are experiencing is not personal in terms of conscious intentionality. You are living with a sinner, so you will experience his sin.

Now, when you personalize what is not personal you *tend to be adversarial in your response*. When that happens, what motivates you is not the spiritual need in your spouse that God has revealed but your spouse's offense against you, your schedule, your peace, etc. So, your response is not a "for him" response but an "against him" response. Rather than wanting to minister to him, what you actually want to do is get him out of your way so you can go back to whatever was engaging you beforehand. Let's be honest—all of us have been there.

When we respond in an adversarial way, we actually escalate the trouble that the other person splashed up on us. This leads to one more thing: because we have turned a moment of ministry into a moment of anger by personalizing what is not personal, we are adversarial in our response, and because we are, we *settle for quick situational solutions that do not get to the heart of the matter*. Rather than searching for ways to help, we tell the other to get a grip, we attempt to threaten them into silence, or we get angry and turn a moment of weakness into a major confrontation.

What Did You Expect?

This is one place where I think the Bible is so helpful. The world of the Bible is like your world—messy and broken. The people of the Bible are like you and your spouse—weak and failing. The situations of the Bible are like yours—complicated and unexpected. The Bible just isn't a cosmetic religious book. It will shock you with its honesty about what happens in the broken world in which we live. From the sibling homicide of Cain to the money-driven betrayal of Judas, the blood and guts of a broken world are strewn across every page. The honesty of God about the address where we all live is itself an act of love and grace. He sticks our head through the biblical peephole so we will be forced to see the world as it really is, not as we fantasize it to be. He does this so that we will be realistic in our expectations, then humbly reach out for the help that he alone is able to give us.

3) God Is Faithful, Powerful, and Willing

There is one more reality that you have to include as you are trying to look at your marriage as realistically as possible. Not only must you consider the fallenness of the world you live in and the fact that both of you are less than perfect, but you must also remember that you are not alone in your struggle. The Bible says that God is near, so near that in your moment of need you can reach out and touch him because he is not far from each one of us (Acts 17:27). Yes, you live in a bad neighborhood (fallen world), and the two of you are less than perfect (sin), but in all this you are not left to your own resources. The God who determined your address lives there with you and is committed to giving you everything you need.

I am writing this a few days after Easter, so my mind has been on the empty tomb. Consider for a moment what the empty tomb of the Lord Jesus Christ teaches us. First, it teaches us that God is *faithful*. Centuries earlier, after Adam and Eve had disobeyed God, God promised that he would crush wrong once and for all. So he sent his Son to defeat sin and death by his crucifixion and resurrection. For thousands of years God neither forgot nor turned from his promise. He did not grow weary, nor would he be distracted. He made a promise, and he controlled the events of history (large and small) so that at just the right moment Jesus Christ would come and fulfill what had been promised.

What Did You Expect?

But the open tomb also reminds us that God is *powerful*. He is powerful in authority and powerful in strength. Think of the authority you would have to have to control all the situations, locations, and relationships in order to guarantee that Jesus would come at the precise moment and do what he was appointed to do! Also, could there be a more pointed demonstration of power than to have power over death? By God's awesome power, Jesus took off his grave clothes and walked out of that tomb. Those guys in power-lifter competitions may be able to pull a bus with their teeth, but they will all die, and there is nothing they can do about it.

The empty tomb points us to one more amazing thing. It teaches us that God is *willing*. Why would he go to such an extent to help us? Why would he care to notice us, let alone rescue us? Why would he ever sacrifice his own Son? Because he is willing. You and I need to recognize that his willingness was motivated not by what he saw in us but by what is inside of him. He is willing because he is the definition of mercy. He is willing because he is the source of love. He is willing because he is full of amazing grace. He is willing because he is good, gentle, patient, and kind. Even when we are unwilling, full of ourselves and wanting our own way, he is still willing. He delights in transforming us by his grace. He delights in rescuing us by his powerful love.

So, when you are sinned against or when the fallen world breaks your door down, don't lash out or run away. Stand in your weakness and confusion and say, "I am not alone. God is with me, and he is faithful, powerful, and willing." You can be realistic and hopeful at the very same time. Realistic expectations are not about hope without honesty, and they are not about honesty without hope. Realism is found at the intersection of unabashed honesty and uncompromising hope. God's Word and God's grace make both possible in your marriage.

Are your expectations for your marriage realistic?

COMMITMENT 1: We will give ourselves to a regular lifestyle of confession and forgiveness.

COMMITMENT 2: We will make growth and change our daily agenda.

COMMITMENT 3: We will work together to build a sturdy bond of trust.

COMMITMENT 4: We will commit to building a relationship of love.

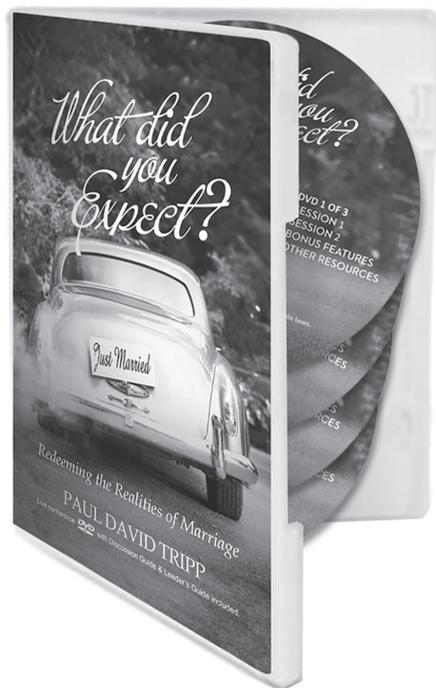
COMMITMENT 5: We will deal with our differences with appreciation and grace.

COMMITMENT 6: We will work to protect our marriage.

You may also be interested in

What did you Expect?

A live video conference



This companion resource to the book comes with a Leader's Guide and Discussion Guide, ideal for small groups, Sunday school classes, and marriage courses. It is available on DVD, CD, or as a digital download.

www.paultripp.com/marriage

Somehow, someway, every marriage becomes a struggle.

Everyone's marriage morphs into something they didn't intend it to be. At some point you need something sturdier than romance. You need something deeper than shared interests and mutual attraction. You need changed expectations, you need radical commitments, and, most importantly, you need grace.



"Noël and I listened to most of this book while driving in the car! Wise words. Authentic experience. Provocative application. It turned a long trip into a fruitful, two-person marriage seminar."

JOHN PIPER, Founder, desiringGod.org; Chancellor, Bethlehem College and Seminary

"This honest book will help you see yourself and your spouse in a new light as it shows you who Jesus is and how to connect his redeeming grace to the daily realities of your marriage. Singles and engaged couples will benefit from it too."

JOSHUA HARRIS, Former Senior Pastor, Covenant Life Church, Gaithersburg, Maryland; author, *Dug Down Deep*

"Paul Tripp faithfully and brilliantly lets the gospel bear its weight on the messiness and beauty of marriage. I, personally, found the book to be helpful, and we use it extensively at The Village."

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"Deep, transparent, biblical, wise, practical, gospel-driven counsel. Rather than muddying the water with self-focused strategies designed to meet our ever-multiplying needs, Paul, as the seasoned soul-physician he is, correctly diagnoses our problems and provides the cure."

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"Tripp presents six commitments for couples to make, and contained within each is insightful, practical, and effective advice on how to construct a loving, growing, grace-soaked marriage."

MARY A. KASSIAN, Professor of Women's Studies, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary; author, *Girls Gone Wise in a World Gone Wild*



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