08-30-26 - Small Group Guide

Small Group Guide: Tug of War -- Expectations
Overview

This session explores how our unmet expectations create conflict in our relationships -- with others, with ourselves, and with God. Drawing from Mark 5 and 6, we examine how even Jesus encountered the disappointment of unmet expectations, and how faith rather than emotion should anchor our response when life does not go the way we anticipated.

Key Takeaways

1. Expectations are universal, but not all of them are godly. We all carry expectations shaped by desire, assumption, comparison, and personal plans. The question is whether those expectations have been surrendered to Christ or whether they still drive our decisions and emotional responses.

2. Unmet expectations reveal where our faith actually lives. When Jesus returned to his hometown, the people's lack of faith limited what God could do among them (Mark 6:5-6). Their familiarity bred skepticism rather than trust. Our unmet expectations can do the same -- they can close us off to what God is actively trying to do in our lives.

3. Jesus modeled faithfulness in the face of disappointment. He was laughed at, doubted, and rejected by people he came to help. He responded not with retaliation or withdrawal, but with continued obedience to the Father. His emotions were real, but they did not have him.

4. Faith is not wishing -- it is knowing. The sermon draws a clear line between emotional hope and genuine faith. Faith takes God at his word and acts on it, even when circumstances, crowds, or personal feelings push back.

5. A lack of faith restricts what God does among us -- individually and collectively. This is not a statement about God's power. It is a statement about our willingness to receive and participate in what he wants to do.

Discussion Questions

Opening (Choose One)

Think of a time when you had a strong expectation of someone and it was not met. Without naming the person, what was the emotional fallout for you? What is one expectation you carried into your Christian life that turned out to be different from reality?

Digging Into the Text

In Mark 5:38-43, the crowd mourning the young girl shifted immediately to laughing at Jesus when he said she was only asleep. What does that reaction reveal about the crowd? Have you ever dismissed something as impossible before you gave God a chance to work?

In Mark 6:1-6, Jesus returns to his hometown and is met with offense and skepticism. The people knew his family, his trade, and his background. Why do you think familiarity sometimes works against faith? Have you ever experienced this in your own relationships or church community?

The sermon points out that Jesus could not do many miracles in his hometown because of their lack of faith. What does it mean to you that human faith -- or the lack of it -- plays a role in what God does in a community? How does that sit with your understanding of God's sovereignty?

The pastor describes two kinds of knowledge in the Greek -- head knowledge and experiential knowledge. How would you describe the difference in your own life? Which one tends to dominate your relationship with God right now?

The sermon says, "Don't let your emotions have you." What is the difference between having emotions and being controlled by them? What does it look like practically to bring your emotions to Christ rather than act on them immediately?

Going Deeper

The pastor asks, "How much more does God want to do with us than we let

him?" What do you think holds your group, your church, or you personally back from greater faith?

The sermon challenges us to examine whether our expectations of God are based on his actual promises or on what we simply want from him. How do you tell the difference in your own life?

Jesus sent his disciples out in Mark 6 with almost nothing -- no extra provisions, no backup plan, and instructions to shake the dust off their feet if they were not welcomed. What does that kind of sent-out faith look like in daily life for someone in your group?

Practical Applications

Choose one or more of the following to practice individually or as a group before your next meeting.

1. Audit Your Expectations Take 15 minutes this week to write down three or four expectations you are currently carrying -- toward God, a family member, a coworker, or your church. For each one, ask honestly: Is this based on a promise God has actually made, or is it based on what I want? Bring your findings back to the group.

2. Practice Open-Handed Prayer The sermon uses the image of clenched fists versus open hands. For one week, begin each morning with a short prayer that intentionally releases one expectation or outcome to God. Notice how it affects your emotional state throughout the day.

3. Read and Reflect Read Mark 5:21 through Mark 6:13 on your own this week. As you read, pay attention to the moments where faith is present and where it is absent. Journal one observation about how faith and expectation interact in each scene.

4. Encourage Someone's Faith The sermon reminds us that God designed the family of believers to meet each other's needs. Identify one person in your group or church whose faith you have witnessed recently. Tell them

specifically what you observed and how it encouraged you.

5. Memorize a Promise Choose one promise from Scripture that speaks directly to an area where your expectations have been disappointed. Write it down and place it somewhere visible. Recite it aloud each day for one week, not as a wish, but as a declaration of what you know to be true.

Closing Reflection

The pastor closed with this challenge: "I found out and lived long enough -- there is a whole lot more in Him when I put my expectations aside and just let Him be my expectation."

Close your group time by inviting each member to complete this sentence aloud:

"One expectation I am willing to release to God this week is..."

Then close in prayer together, asking God to replace each surrendered expectation with a deeper experience of his faithfulness.