

## GTO Seeds for Growth

### WELL, WHAT DID YOU EXPECT? (Part 2 of 2)

By Harold & Bette Gillogly

Remember in our last *Seeds for Growth*, we found out there were two roads leading to two entirely different places. The first road is paved with “ought to be’s” – my wife ought to be.... My husband ought to be.... My children ought to be.... This road leads to a place called **misery**. The other road is paved with truth – the real truth, evaluated by God’s Word. This road leads to a place called **joy**. We each have a choice – every day – as to which place we want to live.

Remember Sandy and Kevin, and how Sandy chose to live in **misery** by holding on to her expectations of Kevin? Along Sandy’s road to **misery** was lots of anger. Before going any further, you may want to re-read Part 1, and then continue to explore these two roads with us.

Not only are there miry puddles of anger along the road to **misery**, there are also pot-holes of manipulation. Here are three short stories about couples stranded in these pot-holes. As you read, see if you can discover (1) the expectation of one or more of the spouses, (2) the thot-talk which keeps the expectation alive (the “old tape of lies)” (3) the resulting ungodly behavior, (4) the change in thot-talk from lies to the truth, and (5) the results of that change.

1. Let us introduce you to Les and Mary. Les would often say something like this to Mary, “You want me to *what*?! Help with the dishes? That’s woman’s work! I make the money, I’m the head of the house, so you have to do the woman’s work and take care of the kids. That’s the way it’s *supposed* to work! And that’s the way it is going to work!”

Les came into marriage expecting his wife to see things *his way*. And He used control to make sure she did. He believed if he said things loud enough and intimidating enough, he should get his way. But he was choosing the road to **misery**. Sure, Nancy *did* all the “woman’s work,” but coldness grew between them like a stone wall.

At a men’s retreat, Les began to realize he wasn’t loving his wife like *Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her* (Ephesians 5:25). He saw his **old tape of lies** for what they were, and began to tell himself the truth. “Just because my father never did anything around the house to help my mother, doesn’t mean I have to be the same way. Besides, Mary works hard and deserves my help. I know God calls

me to be a servant-leader like Jesus. And servants can wash dishes. I’ve been expecting my wife to see everything my way. God, forgive me for my self-centered attitude.”

Les is slowly learning how to be the “head of the house” the way the Scriptures describe – like Jesus is the head of the church. He’s pitching in and helping when his wife asks him, and sometimes he’s even sensitive enough to help before she asks. He’s receiving a lot of appreciation from Mary, which makes him want to help even more.

Les chose to stop believing the lies he had always told himself, and start believing and meditating on the truth of God’s Word. As a result, his attitude changed and so did his behavior. There’s a lot more **joy** in Les and Mary’s home now.

2. Here is another couple stuck in the pothole of manipulation. Nancy grumbles to herself: “That husband of mine doesn’t do anything around the house. I mow the lawn, take out the garbage, shovel the walks. And besides all that, I take care of the children, do the housework, the shopping, you name it! A man is supposed to do all the fixing and muscle work around the house. But I have to remind him about that all the time! I don’t see why he can’t help more! He’d never do anything if I didn’t make him!”

Nancy believed wholeheartedly that her husband Brad **owed it to her** to live up to her expectations of a “good husband.” And she was determined to criticize him until he did, believing that if she **shamed** him enough, he would become the man ‘he ought to be.’

After attending a marriage class, God began to convict Nancy of her **old tape of lies**. She began to tell herself the truth. “Just because my father was Mr. Fixit, doesn’t mean my husband must be the same way. It’s not a Biblical command; God didn’t say, “Men, thou shalt mow the lawn.” It’s not fair for me to criticize Brad for not doing it and constantly make demands about it. If we sit down and talk about it, I know **God can help us** find a workable solution in getting things done around the house.”

As she persistently told herself truths instead of lies, she began to change. Her **critical spirit softened** with her new thot-talk, and she became a less critical person. Her anger subsided along with her

heartburn. She was able to sit down with her husband and calmly find solutions for the work that needed done. Because she no longer expects her husband to be Mr. Fixit, their relationship has definitely taken a turn for the better.

Could you tell by Nancy’s grumbling what her thot-talk was like? Was she ever miserable! And so was Brad. Living with constant criticism and shame is a miserable way to live. But when she started to focus on the truth, Nancy’s life and marriage began to change. She chose the road to **joy**.

3. Here’s another couple – Ted and Sarah. This is how Ted used to operate. “Sarah, I’m so exhausted! What a day! All this overtime is killing me. Of course, I don’t mind the overtime, because it lets me buy you nice things, Honey. But boy, I don’t know how I can stay awake long enough to take Johnny to his Awana meeting tonight.”

At a Festival of Marriage, Ted realized how often he tried to manipulate Sarah (and his kids) into doing what he wanted for himself. He saw how he had been expecting his family to meet his needs without thinking much about their needs in return. He began changing his thot-talk to the truth. “I was laying on the guilt to get my wife to do something for me. She’s had a long day too. And it’s not fair for me to expect her to do what I don’t want to do myself. She doesn’t have to do stuff for me to make me happy. I need to say what I want truthfully, instead of trying to manipulate her by making her feel sorry for me. I want to obey God and ‘**speak the truth in love**.’”

Ted is continuing to input truthful thot-talk, and is getting better at stating what he wants honestly and giving his wife the freedom to choose how she wants to respond. This is what he would now say about the same situation: “Sarah, I’m really tired. Would you please drive Johnny to his Awana meeting tonight?”

All three of these couples used manipulation to try to get what they expected from their mates. It was their “normal” way of relating; they did it without even thinking. They did not stop to consider how harmful their behavior was until God intervened in their lives. Romans 13 specifically states that **love does no harm**. *Love your neighbor* [your wife, your husband, your children] *as*

## What did you Expect (cont')

*yourself. Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law* (Romans 13:9b-10). Manipulation is a hurtful, harmful behavior, and guilt is a hurtful, harmful feeling.

You know, when you think about it, demanding that your spouse live up to your expectations means you must really believe they **owe it to you**. And why do they owe it to you? Why, because you are **right**, of course. But what if you are wr...wr...wr...wrong? The simple fact is that **love does not manipulate**. Love speaks the truth and allows the one loved the freedom to choose what to do with that spoken truth.

God gives us a wonderful promise in Ezekial 36:25-26: *I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols [even when your idol is you]. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you.* What a promise! God will give us a new heart and spirit which do not need to be right, or be in control, or get our own way by manipulation.

There is one more couple we would like you to meet. Once again, you are looking for the expectation, the supporting thot-talk, resulting ungodly behavior, change in thot-talk, and its results.

Everybody likes Paul. He and Sharon have been Christians for three years, and they and their two children are active in their church life. Paul talks, walks and dresses the way he thinks the congregation and his pastor expect him to. He does anything anybody asks. He tries to fulfill all Sharon's expectations, even when he only thinks she might want something. Paul feels anxious most of the time. He's afraid he won't measure up to what people (especially Sharon) expect of him, and then they would be upset with him and would not love him anymore. Most of the nice things he does for Sharon are motivated by his fear of upsetting, and even, losing her.

Paul thinks love is conditional. If he makes a mistake, he thinks the natural result will be rejection. That's how it was in his childhood home, and as an adult, he still believes the lie. His expectation leads him into **fear** and "I need to be needed" feelings which make his stomach churn (**anxiety**), because he constantly tells himself lies like: "I might not meet people's expectations of me. I can't stand for people to think badly of me. I might be rejected. That would be awful. My spouse might get upset with me. I couldn't take

that. If I lose Sandy's love, I'll die." Paul was miserable, not because of reality (WHAT IS), but because of his expectations.

With the help of God and the couple who taught his Sunday School class, Paul faced up to the lies he had been telling himself for so many years (the old tape of lies). He began to **repeatedly** tell himself the truth. "The Bible does not say I should try to please everyone, in fact, it commands me to love God and honor Him, and then genuinely care about others. The kind of love I've displayed is really selfish, because I have just been trying to make Sharon and other people love me in return. It's O.K. that I can't meet everyone's expectations of me. It's O.K. if Sharon gets upset with me. It will pass. Deep down I know she loves me for who I am, not just for what I do for her. And most of all, I know **God loves me unconditionally**, and wants me to accept myself the same way."

As Paul worked consistently and resolutely on truthful thot-talk, his anxiety diminished noticeably. He still did a lot of nice things for Sharon, but more and more it was **out of love, not fear**. Sharon certainly noticed the difference. She began to see Paul as a confident person instead of a clinger, which gave her a new respect for him; and so she felt freer to return Paul's loving behavior, because she didn't feel obligated by it.

Before Paul began the process of changing his thot-talk to the truth according to God's Word, he truly believed that pleasing Sandy was his **insurance policy** which guaranteed she would love him in return. But what Paul found was anxiety and disappointment, not the dividends he was looking for.

"But," you say, "aren't we supposed to please our mates and try to meet their needs?" We sure are! But not because we are trying to make them love and appreciate us in return. If that is our motive, where is our focus? On ourselves. And we will never feel like we've gotten our money's worth.

Jesus reminds us that the greatest commandment is *Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind....Love your neighbor [your wife, your husband] as yourself* (Matthew 22:37-39). Do you see the distinction between loving your mate like you love yourself, and loving your mate because of what you can get in return? A bit different, aren't they? Loving your mate in order to get love and appreciation in return leads to

**anxiety** (the place called **misery**). Loving your mate like you love yourself leads to **contentment** (the place called **joy**).

Please understand that when we speak of such wholehearted acceptance of our mates, we are not including relationships where there is abuse, illicit affairs or overt sin. Such sinful behaviors must be confronted and dealt with honestly. No, we are talking about the relationships in which most of us live, where we just want life and other people to be what we want them to be.

So — O.K., you see how holding on to your expectations of what your mate "ought to be" can drive you down the road to self-absorption and **misery**. And you also see how focusing on the truth, evaluated by God's Word, can set you free and lead you on the road to **joy**. Now what? How do you get off one road and on to the other? The following are the steps we believe the Bible lays out for us.

1. First of all, we must realize and truly believe that joy comes from our relationship with God and His unchanging faithfulness, not from circumstances. Easy to say. Hard to believe. Yet, this is exactly what God says we **must believe**. And He gives us the **grace** to believe it.

Take a look at Paul and Silas in Acts 16:22-25. They were preaching in the region of Macedonia, in a town called Philippi. Paul had cast a demon out of a young fortune teller, upsetting her owners so much they brought charges against them before the magistrate. *The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten (humiliated and hurt). After they had been severely flogged (open bleeding wounds across their backs), they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. Upon receiving such orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks. (How uncomfortable! Their backs are bleeding. They can't lie down. They are in the inner cell. Pools of urine and feces...rats. The stench so strong, it is sickening.) About midnight Paul and Silas were....*

...commiserating with each other. "Those rotten heathen. We preached salvation to them, and look what they did to us! Why should we tell them about the Christ when they treat us like this? This sure isn't what I expected being an evangelist would be like. This isn't the way it ought to be. Nobody cares about us. God must not even care. He's left us to rot in this awful place! Phooey! I give up!"

## What did you Expect (cont')

**No, that isn't what Paul and Silas did.** It probably is what we would have done, isn't it? Be honest now. But they, by the grace of God, *were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.* How could they do that? Because they believed their joy came from their relationship with God and His unchanging faithfulness, not from circumstances. And if they could do it, **so can we by the same divine grace.**

Did you notice the last phrase of verse 25...*the other prisoners were listening to them?* Who is watching and listening to you in your house? Do you think your children pick up on how you handle the circumstances of life? How you treat their mom or dad? Your attitude toward them? And they are forming their expectations right now – **based on yours.**

2. The second truth we must realize is that we are in control of our happiness or unhappiness. Remember, it is what we let camp in our minds that makes us who we are. As a man thinks within himself, so is he (Proverbs 23:7). There is a phrase in Telling Yourself the Truth by William Backus and Marie Chapian that sums it up quite well: "Change a person's beliefs and you will change his feelings and behavior."

3. The third truth we must believe is that we can change. 2 Corinthians 5:17 clearly states, *Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.* This is what is called a "positional statement." God gives the gift of "**new creaturehood**" to every believer. But we get to choose every day whether we want to live like an old creature or like a new creature.

In Ephesians 4:21-24, Paul explains the **process** of becoming a new creature.

*Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.* Notice the step between "putting off your old self" and "putting on your new self" is "**be made new in the attitude of your minds.**" Our attitude becomes new when we "gird up the loins of our mind" and tuck them into the belt of truth. (Remember the Roman soldier and how he gathered the loose ends of his garment and tucked them into his belt?)

4. The fourth step is to locate and identify the old tapes of lies in our thot-talk. We've played these tapes so many times, they just play all by themselves anymore. "If only my mate would change. Poor me. My mate ought to be.... Life ought to be.... I'm not getting enough out of this relationship. Poor me." These thoughts have become a stronghold in many of our lives. But if you stop yourself every time you catch yourself thinking "poor me," you will be well on your way to switching to the road that leads to **joy.**

Paul shares a wonderful truth about this very thing in 1 Corinthians 10:4-5: *The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.* How do you take your thoughts captive? That's right – you purposely gather them up and tuck them into the belt of truth.

5. And that steers us into the next step – replace the old tapes of lies with the

**truth.** Jesus prayed to the Father in John 17:17, *Sanctify them (believers) by the truth; your word is truth.* Our expectations and what we perceive as reality must be measured by God's Word. Otherwise, our "reality" will always **slant toward ourselves.** That is why we are commanded in Romans 12:2, *Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world [where everything revolves around you] but be transformed by the **renewing of your mind.** Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

What is **God's will for your marriage** – His good, pleasing and perfect will for your marriage? That you hang on to the unrealistic expectations you have of each other? That you make demands of each other, believing your mate owes you his or her compliance? Or is His will for your marriage that you learn to love each other with agape – unconditional – love? According to Romans 12:2, we will never find God's will for our marriage, unless we are in the process of being "transformed by the renewing of our minds." We challenge you to purposefully cooperate with the Holy Spirit in this transformation process.

Why not get out pen and paper right now and write your mate an emancipation proclamation? Say, "Honey, it is all right with me that you be you. I hereby set you free from my expectation that you....." (You fill in the rest.) Good, you've let go of one expectation. Don't stop there. Check your expectation levels every month, and as God reveals another one to you, give it to Him and write your mate another emancipation proclamation. Determine to live in the place called **joy.** It's a far better place to live than **misery.**

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