Be Known, the Podcast

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Episode 74: When You Expect Too Much of Yourself

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This is Be Known, and I’m Kerrah Fabacher. You’re listening to episode \_\_\_74\_\_\_. We were made for relationship, but so often our relationships are broken. And when our relationships are broken, *we* are broken. One of our deepest human desires is to be known, but we often have lost ourselves along the way. This is a podcast to help you get your relationships back to a place of wholeness. A place of authentic connection, where you feel truly known, and where your people do, too.

So come on in and sit a while. Let’s exchange fear for love and finally see what good relationships are made of.

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I talk about expectations with nearly every client who comes in the counseling room. If not every one. We’ve talked about what it looks like to adjust expectations of others in this space way back in Ep. 17, but I want to revisit this topic for a moment today.

The word “expectation” means several things, but the definition that applies to this conversation is this:

“a strong belief about the way something should happen or how someone should behave.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

Expectations are what we think we *should* act like, be like, or look like. They could be imposed by others or self-imposed, but they’re always there somewhere under the surface. Most of us aren’t aware of our expectations of ourselves, though, because to be aware of them we’d have to have some tough conversations with ourselves. And we don’t like having to face these kind of things.

When I look back on my life thus far, I can name many expectations I’ve had for myself over the years.

 An expectation to:

 Be smart and do well in school (like my big sister did)

 Work hard

 Make a lot of money since I knew what it was like to struggle

 Be skinny and pretty (and a million things I’ve thought that entails)

 Keep a clean house

 Do something in the medical field (again, like my big sister)

 Be a strong Christian and do things right (in a super legalistic way)

 Juggle it all perfectly

 Be like the people around me so I’d fit in

 Not show too much skin

 Not be too flirty

 Not drink too much

 Be super involved in church (including small groups and serving and leading and all the things)

 Be polite

 Be respectful of my parents and every single adult I come in contact with (no matter how obnoxious they are)

 Be patriotic and respect my govt. leaders

 Be a playful, fun, energetic, social mom

 Be a submissive wife and stay no matter what

 Not ever show too much emotion or be too sensitive

 Hold it together

 Be a peacekeeper and don’t stir the pot

 Not be too opinionated, because that’s rude

Man, I could go on and on and on. Expectations are there whether we see them or not. We begin to develop expectations of ourselves from others voicing their own expectations of us:

 Sit up straight

 Don’t talk during church

 Sit down at dinner

 Clean your room

 Make straight A’s

 Don’t lie

 Don’t curse

What others would consider appropriate becomes this unhealthy expectation of near perfect behavior. We also begin to expect things of ourselves because we compare ourselves to others. We compare what we look like, how we act, what we like, who we are to others around us. And the things that get the positive attention, yeh, that’s what we think we’re supposed to do or be like.

People who are skinny or muscular get romantic attention

People who are smart get the honors and great jobs

People who are outgoing and intentional are well-liked and make more friends

We see others, and we think, “Oh, maybe I’m supposed to be like this instead of how I am.”

Or maybe we have expectations of ourselves due to religious teaching, past hurt or trauma, or because this is the way our family is *supposed* to be. But as I’ve gotten older, I’ve realized my own expectations of myself are not compassionate, not accepting. They’re actually a bit judgmental, if I’m honest. They come from a little bit off all those things I just mentioned, but it’s not fair to expect all of that of myself anymore.

Because if I do, I’ll live in a constant state of disappointment.

And constant disappointment in myself is shame.

So I’d like you to do this at some point this week. I want you to get a piece of paper and a pen. Get ready for full-blown honesty. None of this is going to work if you keep hiding from yourself. You have to come face-to-face with the expectations you have of yourself.

Write down different categories— like expectations you have of yourself at school or work/ how you look (your body and appearance) / in relationships with friends, family, etc. / as a Christian/ In your various roles (mom, boss, business owner etc.). Then start writing. Many of these won’t be expectations you’ve ever spoken out loud to yourself, but they’re still there. Look under the surface of your behaviors. When I look in the mirror, what is it that I expect to see? How do I feel when I don’t see that? When I interact with others, what actions do I expect to see? How do I feel when I don’t act like that? Just write every single expectation you can think of. Don’t hold back. Even if it sounds ridiculous or unrealistic, write it down.

Once you’ve finished, I want you to sit back and see this list. Look at each one and ask these questions:

 Is this realistic for me? (Reasonable for my stage of life, my personality, my body type, my age, things outside of my control right now?)

 Is this helpful?

 Is this kind or compassionate?

 Is this accepting?

 Is this healthy?

 If no in any of these, it’s time to make adjustments. To every single one that isn’t kind or realistic or helpful. So here’s what this has looked like for me:

 I don’t have to act like those around me who seem to be more popular or well-liked. I don’t have to be as outgoing, as social. I can be my more introverted self, and that is enough.

 I don’t have to be wrinkle-free and stretch-mark free and cellulite free. I’m a 34 year old mom of three, and my body isn’t going to look like it did when I was 20. And that’s okay. My body is changing, but my body is good.

 I don’t have to associate with a political party just because every one around me did growing up. I can decide things on my own.

 I don’t have to be like my sister. I can live as me, and that’s enough.

Gosh, do you hear the acceptance and compassion in this language? Now, it’s your turn. Look at those expectations you listed. Look at them honestly and humbly. Are you seeing any that are either way too low (I’ll never be good enough, so why try at all— kind of language) or way to high? Are you seeing them as unrealistic and not in line with who you are? Then spend time and rewrite them. Use compassionate language this time.

Now, as a caveat, I’m not saying throw expectations out the window completely. Because to hope is to expect. We can grow from expecting more from ourselves. This is fine. When we read the New Testament, it’s clear there are some expectations on those of us who follow and love Jesus. We can’t ignore those. It’s when we live in a constant state of shame and disappointment in ourselves that we need to reevaluate what we expect of ourselves. Because that shame is not what God intended.

Donald Miller says, “When you stop expecting people to be perfect, you can like them for who they are.”

 ―A Million Miles in a Thousand Years: What I Learned While Editing My Life

When you stop expecting yourself to be something you’re not, or something you can’t be, you begin to find more confidence and actually start to like yourself, just the way you are.

You can grow and still accept yourself where you’re at.

So here’s to adjusting unrealistic expectations.

And showing ourselves the kind of grace Jesus shows us, too.

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Thanks for sitting a while with me. I trust that adjusting the unrealistic expectations you have of yourself will help you take a step toward wholeness so you can finally see what good relationships are made of.

As always, you can follow along on Instagram @kerrahfabacher or find the goods over on [www.kerrahfabacher.com](http://www.kerrahfabacher.com).

To finish up, the transcript for this episode is on the podcast page on my website, kerrahfabacher.com.

A big thanks to my friend Robert Hargrove for creating the music for the show, and fellow hope\*writer, Alana Dawson, for being a great editor.

Until next time friend, I’ll see you soon.

1. https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/us/definition/american\_english/expectation#:~:text=expectation-,noun,expectation%20of%20a%20full%20recovery. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)