

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

I wish to thank Charles Dickens for the title, ..but not the concept, and I will not mention Pip's name again, nor will I refer to his life's story.

I'm sure my teacher's response was right, when I protested having to read that book – Great Expectations. She told me something like, "It was required reading, and thus it is good for me, and so read it."

I'm sure I'm a better person for having read it.

We have dreams, and we have hopes.... and when the odds of something happening are fairly high, we have expectations for the outcome.

And, when our "expectations" for things desirable don't happen, then,we are disappointed, to say the least.

Advent is a season of expectation..... and preparation. I think what really separates a hope from an expectation is our level of input / our actions of preparation investing in the outcome.

We are pretty certain that Christmas is coming, so we decorate our homes and make the usual preparations.

Yet, things change; we can't guarantee what tomorrow brings. We have dreams, hopes and expectations,..... and maybe.... even promises, but even so..... the future is a surprise.

*This year, we were **not** expecting any company for Christmas; however, Jessica and Dima's plans to go to Belarus fell through.*

They had planned and expected to go there, but can't, so now we are looking forward to their visit here.

They have flight reservations, so we are pretty sure they are coming, and so we are starting to make plans – we are preparing.

We prepare / we work, even sacrificefor what we think will happened.... well.... almost.... we tend to stir into that picture.... a couple of things: our personal passions and desires...and the illusion that we are more powerful than we are—that we can control the future..

And, both of those things can cloud the reality image.... some.

For example, as individuals and as a country, we are not preparing for the affects of global warming.....because..... we don't want it to cost us anything,and many of us believe that we are powerful enough to solve any problem that comes our way.

We don't like the predictions and we think we can alter anything, so we ignore the warnings, and keep burning and extracting fossils fuels....

Sometimes our personal passions, myths and desires can sabotage sound thinking,..... with lasting results.

Distorted expectations will alter prudent preparation, and this is especially true when raising children.

Some parents think they can shape their children as if they are malleable and inanimate as clay.

Of course, we usually only hear of the examples that seemed to work, such as how Walter Gretzky trained his son to be the "Great ONE."

There are many other similar examples, such as in tennis it is the Williams sisters, and in Golf – Tiger Woods.

If we are impressed by such parental expectations and manipulations, then we are not looking at the big picture.

What sort of person is Wayne Gretzky? Is he well rounded and emotionally healthy, and..... well, considering current events, I don't need to comment on Tiger Woods.

Moreover, we rarely hear of the horror stories about how parents tried to berate and force their children into be superstars, and **all** fell short.

We are not so wise,..... and we definitely are Not so powerful.
We can not control the future, and that includes our children's future.

Nevertheless, there **are** benefits in nurturing, teaching and inspiring our children.
I believe we are products of both nurture and nature, therefore we can instill a solid foundation in our children, such as having good values that will aid in making good choices.

Raising children in the church has many benefits that are derived from implanting Biblical lessons, sharing a heritage, receiving insight and affirmation from other adults.... and ... being loved enough to receive prayers.

What we acquire / what we learned as a child does NOT guarantee how we will turn out, yet those basic tools become a reflex / a default mode that affect our decisions, especially in times of crisis.

Therefore, we can and must confidently strive to inspire our children, as we prayer for their well being. We must counter the popular culture messages that inundate our children,with lessons that invigorate self discipline, patience, restraint, justice, grace and peace.

In a world that seems to be infatuated with revenge, domination, destruction and violence, we
Must teach patience, justice peace and grace.
We can NOT control our children's future, but we –all adults– are very influential in the lives of
our children.

*Toys for example: I agree with what Abe said last Sunday. We shouldn't accept or provide
War / combat video games.
We can do better than mimicking pop culture.*

One of the best ways to inspire our children is to model what we believe, and in my opinion.....
that includes NOT doing violence as punishment.
Research has shown that children are more inclined to associate the corporate punishment with
the one doing the punishing INSTEAD of with the undesired behaviour.

Usually, corporate punishment is done for the sake of the parent and not for the benefit of the
child, and we can do better than that.

Parents can model patience, creativity and grace.....

Even so..... EVEN So, we can not control the future and we can not control how our
children will turn out, but we can help. We can share ourselves / invest ourselves.

An example:

Mr and Mrs Stapp were very proud of their son; he was a reflection of their values and beliefs.
They kept him very active in the church. He frequently sang in church, and he knew the Bible
through and through; however, they were very, very strict. They even made him wear a white
shirt and tie to school, which attracted a lot of abuse from other students. Their desire to shield
him from the evils of the world lacked patience, respect and grace. He was a reflection of what
they expected of him,.... until he turned 17, and then he wasn't so loyal anymore.
When he turned 18, he left home, moved to Tallahassee and formed a Rock band.
Mr. and Mrs Stapp were very disappointed. All their efforts seemed in vane. They thought they
were doing the right thing, and when their son didn't turn out as planned, they became angry
with God.

The Hebrews often felt angry and frustrated with God. Life rarely seemed to match their
desires. God had promised to be in a good relationship with them, yet more often than not,.....
there was disappointment..... on both sides. Yet, neither the people or God were ready to give
up.

Both the Malachi and the Luke One passages are filled with hope and anticipation – hoping for
the Messiah and looking for the one the messenger who prepares the way for the messiah.

Malachi assures the people that the messenger is coming, and he spices that prediction with the
warning that the message may be a tad harsh.

Luke is a bit more chimerical– more idealistic.

In Luke, Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, has a glowing prediction about the coming Messiah..... and of course, about his son, too.

Frustrated and disappointed people are listening; people who want to be delivered from all that ails them.

They want to live out their dreams,..... just as parents want their children to live out..... the parents' dreams....

We know very little about John the Baptist's early years. I suppose his parents had the common hopes and aspirations that all parents have, perhaps even more so, since they were told by an angel that Their Son was THE messenger.

:) Can you imagine their surprise and disappointment when John left home, and went out to live in the wilderness like an animal,.....eating all sorts of strange things.... John was a full time "Survivor Man".

I bet John's parents didn't picture THAT scenario, and then when he does resurface, John goes around telling everyone to CHANGE and be baptized.

To be sure, we know the whole story, but I wonder what Elizabeth and old Zack were thinking. Maybe they were questioning their parenting skills? Maybe they were realizing that there is risk in hoping; there is a risk in having a child..... ???

It is a risk to raise a child. There are great risks in loving, too.

And, if we think about it. God took a great risk in introducing Jesus into the world. Things could have gone wrong.???

We believe that Jesus was fully divine and Fully human, which means that Jesus, like all humans, had choice.

God took a risk in Jesus,just as all of us take a risk in having a child or children.... or.... in loving someone.

We just don't know.....

Back to the Stapp family:

Within a few short years and after receiving a degree in music, Scott Stapp formed a new band in 1995. By 1999, that band was fairly well known. The band's name was Creed. Scott was the lead singer and wrote most of the songs.

Creed sounded a bit like Pearl Jam, yet their lyrics were spiritual, even messianic. Scott didn't write traditional Christian songs, but his words were deep in meaning and reached millions of young people. Numerous teenagers, back in the 90's, asserted that if it wasn't for Creed's music, they would have committed suicide [as per MTV biography].

Scott's parents reformed their opinion of their renegade son. They had hoped that he would be a preacher, yet even his mother admitted that Scott is likely reaching far more people than he ever could have,... if he had become a preacher.

By the year 2000, Creed had a number of huge hits; Scott had a son of his own; his parents were feeling better about things..... and..... we just can't predict the future.

By 2004, Scott was divorced and remarried, the band had acrimoniously broken up... and Scott's life was getting ugly.....because of bad choices.

We can have Great Expectations,... but we just don't know how things will turn out, and maybe our expectations are not realistic???

Investing our selves, loving someone and raising children can be very challenging, risky and difficult..... for parent and child alike.

Malachi mentions the process of purifying silver ... in regards to the preparation. Citing a refiner's fire???

Upon first reading, this simile did NOT sound appealing. It sounded more like torture,.... until I researched what was involved in the purification of silver.

The Silversmith applies just enough heat for Just the right amount of time. If either is exceeded by the slightest amount, then the silver is injured.

Purifying silver is a careful, patient, nurturing process.

With that insight, I now like the analogy.

It is a good example for parenting and for better understanding our relationship with God,... as God's children.

We gently nurture, as we are being nurtured.... with a vision of improvement, and in the process.... we all learn and grow,.... we hope.

I learned a lot from my parents, including grace..... And I bet they learned something from me too,.... perhaps the need for patience???

And I also learned that my parents can NOT keep me from all harm, especially beyond a certain point. I learned to rely on their help, but not on being rescued.

And, as a parent,.... I've come to realize that I am powerful...when I give myself,..... Yet weak when I try to force myself or my will on my children.

Think about that..... because today's message isn't directly about parenting.

The passages are about revelation—God's revelation to us.

God is reaching out to us to mend / to strengthen our relationship with God.

God sends a message through a messenger.... to get ready / to expect an encounter, an honest and realistic encounter.

God never promised to heal every wound. To rescue us from all that is wrong or painful. God didn't promise to do miracles on demand.

God promised to be faithful / to be in a loving relationship with us, and through the scriptures, the church and other means, God has taught us how to do this Right relationship with God, AND... through Jesus... God has modelled it for us, too.

We have the necessary tools, ... yet... I wonder if we understand how to use them. Just as God gave God self to us,... the power to transform / to inspire and to redeem is in the giving.

Manipulation, Fear and brute force rarely work ... because those ways are weak. The power is in the giving of self – the letting go.

A final comment about Scott Stapp:

I'm not sure if he hit the bottom or not, but he experienced a radical change. He worked hard at changing his way of living, and he went to his former band members and asked for forgiveness. The band Creed reformed, a year ago, and released a new album this past Spring, called Full Circle.

Is he home free? ??? Is it a happy ending?

We don't know. Nobody knows. Life is a process. We don't what will happen next.

We live by faith..... or deception.

In truth, we cannot control tomorrow, andOur power is in the giving away.

Love works that way, and that is what this season is about, and that is what life is about. If we expect more, then we are missing the point.

God gave to the world..... God's self in the apparent weakest of forms – a baby. Yet, the gift of Jesus was an act of power because.....a baby invites giving.

Let us turn around and see that.

Peace, Patience, Justice and Grace are from giving.

Our salvation, the salvation of our children and the world begins with giving of self. How can we expect less?

God is with us, now, in the giving away.