

Cultivate. **RELATIONSHIPS**
PRESENTS



HOW TO ~~GET PEOPLE TO DO~~ ~~WHAT YOU WANT~~ ASK NICELY

(Or, Principles in Healthy Communication & Expectations)

A CULTIVATE RELATIONSHIPS RESOURCE

Content in this booklet comes from our book:

UN*LOVE*

A BOOK ABOUT UNLEARNING AND
RESHAPING WHAT YOU KNOW ABOUT
GOD, LOVE, PEOPLE, AND RELATIONSHIPS

Get the book at our website:
www.CultivateRelationships.com/Resources



Hello!

We are Nathan & Lacey Steel are purveyors of relational healing, wholeness, and discipleship. They are parents of two adopted homeschoolers and consumers of strong coffee. We started Cultivate Relationships to encourage and equip people to enjoy life no matter what and live connected to God and others.

Cultivate Relationships was inspired by our own journey to relational wholeness — from isolation and anger to living connected.

Nathan struggled with a deep-rooted bitterness toward his dad, an inability to share his feelings, and a 20-year addiction to pornography. Lacey struggled with a fear that fed her explosive anger producing a need to control people and circumstances.

As we intentionally resolved these issues and moved to a place of personal freedom and relational wholeness, we became full-time, donor-supported missionaries at Bible School in Homer, Alaska. It was at this school that we developed and taught the Christian Living Course — a curriculum based on the healing, wholeness, and discipleship in Jesus that we had experienced. During this time, we saw students set free from life-long bitterness, reunited with estranged family members, and freed from childhood traumatic experiences.

It was from this life-changing experience that God gave us the desire to move beyond the classroom — to expand what we had developed and give it away. So, in 2017, we moved to Texas and launched Cultivate Relationships, LLC., a ministry that provides healing, wholeness, and discipleship in Jesus to people who desire to better hear the voice of God and live empowered by the Holy Spirit so that they may enjoy life and live connected. Learn more at our website:

www.CultivateRelationships.com

God bless,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nathan Steel", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Nathan Steel

**In any relationship, the most critical skill is
to learn how to manage assumptions and
expectations in a healthy manner.**

"It is impossible to be spiritually mature
while remaining emotionally immature."

Peter Scazzero
Emotionally Healthy Spirituality

What You Will Learn:

*The Difference Between Valid
and Invalid Expectations*

—

How to Communicate Valid Expectations

—

How to Resolve Unmet Expectations

**WHEN YOU ASSUME
YOU MAKE AN... NEVER MIND**

(Or, Just Assume the Best About Others)

Ungracious assumptions and invalid expectations in our relationships is a breeding ground for the enemy's lies — it will steal, kill, and destroy our relationships.

Acts 20.28

*Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock,
among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.*

Before we can care (watch over) others emotionally, we need to first watch over ourselves emotionally — we can't care about the emotional health of others if we are first uncaring toward our own emotional health.

The reality is, if we are emotionally unhealthy, our relationships will be emotionally unhealthy.

Psalms 78.72

*So [David] shepherded them according to the integrity of his heart,
and guided them with his skillful hands.*

A self-awareness (integrity of one's own heart) is sacred. So many relationship tools focus on developing "skillful hands" (doing the "right" thing) toward others.

For example, if a husband buys his wife flowers or does the dishes, expecting it to resolve a conflict (even though he is actually avoiding it), it may only prolong the issue. In reality, being emotionally and mentally present with his wife during

the conflict encourages communication and understanding which leads to resolution.

Our focus should be on having self-awareness (integrity of heart) — from which our “hands” will become skillful. We do not need to be well-rounded to be relationally effective. BUT we do need to be whole.

The first step toward whole, healthy relationships is learning to manage our assumptions and expectations.

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

Have you ever been lied about or misunderstood by someone? How did that make you feel?

Exodus 20.16

*Do not accuse anyone falsely
(or you must not tell lies about your neighbor).*

To accuse someone falsely or tell lies isn't just what we say. It also includes what we think about them. It includes assuming that we know the motives and intentions of other people's words and actions.

Exodus 20.16 is referring to giving a testimony in a courtroom setting. With this context, we can look at our mind as the courtroom. The judge, jury, and witness is us and our

assumptions. These assumptions are our conviction of the other person. And the penalty is our reaction toward them.

Our assumptions — whether encouraging or discouraging — will affect how we interact with others. Practicing gracious assumptions will enable us to develop healthy expectations resulting in life-giving relationships.

Assuming the best builds people up, creating a healthy relational environment. There are three rules to be aware of and live by when it comes to our assumptions:

Rule #1: Be Aware of Your Assumptions

Our brains are wired to make assumptions about the people and the world around us based upon past experiences. For example, we make assumptions every time we sit down on a chair because our experience with chairs has proven (generally) their reliability. Unconscious assumptions enable our brains to conserve energy by focusing on what's most important.

Rule #2: Be Gracious with Assumptions

We all make assumptions about people — unconscious rules for how we believe they should behave. For example, when we see someone, we know and say “hello”, we assume they will say “hello” back. Our assumptions can either bring hope and life to people around us or they bring condemnation and death. Gracious assumptions believe the best about

someone's motives and behaviors — this includes when being confronted.

Rule #3: Be Willing to Test Assumptions

Testing our assumptions means we clarify (and make valid) our expectations. We give the other person an opportunity to “defend themselves” in the courtroom of our mind. Asking genuine questions is a great way to care for the person and test our assumptions. For example, if someone does not say “hello” back when you know that they usually would, asking them if everything is alright (in a truly caring tone) will open it up for them to “defend” themselves. It will guard us from becoming offended and then “convicting” them with our actions. Our willingness to have a conversation with the person about what happened will give them the opportunity to clarify their actions or intentions. Our untested assumptions about a person's motives, abilities, and desires will lead to unhealthy expectations that will leave us feeling disappointed, discouraged, and frustrated. Often, our expectations of others are rooted in untested assumptions — these unhealthy expectations

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

In what areas have you been convicting others in your mind (assuming the worst or believed the worst)? How exactly did you condemn them (behave toward them in light of this ungracious assumption)?

Turning Ungracious Assumptions to Believing the Best

Believing the best means we choose to see our spouse how God designed them and sees them.

1 Corinthians 14.1, 3

It is love, then, that you should strive for. Set your hearts on spiritual gifts, especially the gift of proclaiming God's message...

But those who proclaim God's message speak to people and give them help, encouragement, and comfort.

Prophecy is speaking God's heart and opinion toward a matter, person, or issue. If we are disappointed, frustrated, or discouraged about another person, sometimes it can be that we are disagreeing with God's opinion about them. Therefore, we may need to:

- 1) **Forgive:** release and entrust to God our expectation of how they should behave and the outcomes;
- 2) **Pray:** ask the Holy Spirit to reveal what His opinion is of the person;
- 3) **Believe the Opposite:** use your negative thoughts about the person as a guide — choose to believe the exact opposite thing about them;
- 4) **Speak This Belief Over Them:** If appropriate, reach out to them with a message or prayer of what you chose to believe. If not, meditate on these thoughts and prayers personally.

ACTIVATION STEPS

Using the person you convicted from the previous application question, what is the exact opposite of those convictions? Write them a letter declaring the exact opposite of those convictions and speak that over them.

NOTE: Please use discernment on whether it is appropriate to contact this person or if you should just meditate on those yourself.

**YEAH, BUT THEY SHOULD
JUST KNOW WHAT TO DO**

(Or, Making Healthy Expectations of Others)

Many of our frustrations, disappointments, and discouragements with others are a result of the unhealthy invalid expectations we have of them. Once we've tested our assumptions, we can build healthy expectations by following these four steps.

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

Think of a recent, simple expectation you have had of someone that went unmet and made you feel unloved, uncared for, disrespected, or out of control. Were you aware you had this expectation prior to being disappointed, frustrated, or discouraged? How had you clearly communicated the expectation or did you just think, "they should just know"? What is the evidence you had to support that this expectation was realistic and achievable by the person? Had the other person agreed to fulfill the expectation you had of them?

Step #1: Make the Expectation Known

“...” Nothing is said because nothing is known.

When we were first married, my wife would get frustrated seeing the trash overflow. She had grown up with her dad always taking it out and assumed I would do the same automatically.

RED FLAG ► Frustration or disappointment at a person (or situation) is often the only signal we have of an unknown expectation. Discovering this unknown expectation begins with acknowledging our frustration and disappointment.

- Known expectations are desires we know we have of a person. This may include clarifying misunderstandings — either in our own mind or in theirs.
- This will require that you talk to the other person about the expectation to clarify both your expectations of them AND allow them to voice their concerns or misunderstandings.

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

Using a recent time you were disappointed or frustrated at someone, what do you think the expectation was that you had of them that went unmet?

Step #2: Make the Expectation Spoken

"They should just know... it's obvious."

Once Lacey recognized her frustration, she communicated her expectation. We talked through it and agreed on what "full" meant and when she wanted the trash taken out. Due to shifting circumstances throughout the years, we've had to revisit and adjust expectations.

RED FLAG ► Mutual frustration will be felt by both people when expectations are unspoken or not clearly defined and therefore, go unmet. Also, we will feel disappointed at them and they will feel discouraged by us.

- Spoken expectations includes defining terms, maintaining a positive attitude, outlining consequences for not fulfilling the expectation, and being direct rather than having vague assumptions.
- Expectations can have many layers that need defining and clear communication. Writing these expectations down can help clear up or even prevent misunderstandings.
- A conversation where the other person is free to ask questions and voice concerns can help uncover the true expectation and also clear up unrealistic expectations.
- Conversations about expectations may require apologizing for unknown, unspoken, or unrealistic expectations that caused frustration and disappointment for both sides.

- Sometimes, this conversation may have to take place several times — with follow up conversation — to revisit and clarify misunderstandings. Having gracious and patient clarifying conversations, without nagging or lecturing, will allow you both to revisit the expectation and make it reasonable and realistic.
- Possible statements to help you clarify your expectation can include:
 - ↳ *"I'd like to clarify an expectation I have had of you..."*
 - ↳ *"I expect ____ because _____. Can you agree to that? Why or why not?"*
 - ↳ *"I was wondering if you could ____? Are you willing to do that?"*
 - ↳ *"Can I clarify an expectation I think you have of me? [Insert expectation] Is this true?"*
 - ↳ *"Do I have your permission to read your mind? I think you expect me to _____. Is this true?"*
 - ↳ *"It seems like you're frustrated that I am not doing [insert expectation] correctly to your expectation? Can you tell me or show me how to do ____? Can we talk about how I do ____?"*

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

What were the misunderstandings, confusion, frustration, or disagreements that you two had about the expectation — like how and when it should be fulfilled?

Step #3: Make the Expectation Realistic

“They should be able to...” or “There’s no reason they can’t...”

Due different seasons requiring adjustments or simply me forgetting, Lacey has had to shift her expectations for how, when, and even if the trash will be taken out. This has led to me setting a timer on my phone each night to remind me to take the trash out.

RED FLAG ► Frustration will be felt by both people when expectations are not realistic and go unmet. Also, we will feel disappointed at them and they will feel discouraged by us.

- Realistic expectations are practical and reasonable desires we have for people and circumstances based on past experiences. This evidence includes a conversation with the other person where we define what is reasonable
- Clarification leads to realistic expectations through open dialogue and understanding what might be practical and reasonable for them.
- Regardless of whoever initiates, follow-up conversations can refine expectations, explore alternatives, and negotiate outcomes, making them more realistic and easier to accept and fulfill.

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

How will you make your current expectation realistic and reasonable for the other person?

Step #4: Make the Expectation Accepted

"I told them so I assumed they would do it."

Yes, I have agreed to take the trash out. However, Lacey has had to practice patience and grace and work through frustration. She's also come up with some creative "non-conventional" silly ways to remind me.

RED FLAG ► Holding someone to an expectation they've not agreed to or are incapable of fulfilling only leads to unnecessary disappointment on our part and frustration and discouragement on theirs.

- Accepted expectations are ones that the other person understands and agrees to, including the terms, definitions, and outcomes of the expectation.
- This may require negotiating the terms so that you are both in agreement as to what needs to be done and the timeframe in which the expectation needs to be fulfilled.
- Re-evaluating and negotiating the expectation provides the opportunity to come to an agreement.
- Finally, this may include having to apologize for unknown or unspoken expectations. Also, it may require you to forgive previous unmet agreed upon expectations.

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

What are you willing to release to make your expectation a reasonable, realistic, and agreeable one?

ACTIVATION STEPS

Think of the unmet expectation you listed in the application question from Step #1 – Make the Expectation Known. Is this expectation still needing to be fulfilled by the other person? Share with them the expectation you wrote down. Practice clarifying this expectation using the four steps we outlined in this section.

YOU SHOULD RETALIATE

(Or, Resolving Unmet Expectations of Others)

I still forget to take out the trash. Lacey has spent decades forgiving me and having countless grace-filled conversations about it. Her patience has encouraged me not to give up and to keep striving to meet her expectations.

Unmet valid expectations can lead to frustration and disappointment, making us feel unloved, uncared for, and out of control. If left unresolved, these feelings can breed bitterness and disrupt our relationships and our peace of mind. Holding onto offense (hurt, disappointed, frustrated, etc.) when someone disregards or refuses to meet our expectations (especially if they are known, spoken, and realistic) only perpetuates the cycle of anxious thoughts in our mind. To restore peace, we must take intentional steps, including those we've previously discussed, to process and resolve these feelings.

Step #1: Forgive the Person

Forgiving others for not meeting our valid expectations releases us from the stress and anxiety of needing to rely upon them. This may require us apologizing for judging them — and therefore responding poorly — because of us not knowing, not speaking, not clarifying, or not making our expectation realistic or agreed upon. Clarifying or negotiating what the expectation is may also need to happen.

Step #2: Clarify & Define the Expectation

Misunderstandings of expectations should be communicated and clarified in a gracious manner. If the clarified expectation continues to go unmet, perhaps revisiting and defining the terms of the expectation will bring it to a place of clarity and importance for the other person.

Step #3: Revisit the Expectation

Often, expectations are either forgotten or unconsciously ignored. We have all done this ourselves. This is where assuming the best (believing they simply forgot rather than it being a malicious ignoring of our expectation) can help us have a hope-filled outlook and a grace-filled conversation with them. Graciously revisiting and reminding the person of the expectation helps prevent unnecessary frustration. This is NOT nagging or lecturing. Rather, it's a thoughtful, well-timed reminder given with grace, patience, and understanding. Approaching the conversation with kindness and clarity cultivates better communication and increases the likelihood of the expectation being met without creating tension or resentment.

Step #4: Negotiate the Expectation

If expectations continue to go unmet, we may need to graciously negotiate our expectations. It may be an issue of reasonableness; having too high an expectation — even if they agree to it — for them to fulfill it to our liking.

Negotiating down to something that would be easier and more manageable to achieve (having clear next steps) can minimize frustration, discouragement, and disappointment. You may need to bring in another person (preferably unbiased) to help mediate the negotiation and clarify the communication of the expectations.

Step #5: Forgive the Unmet Expectation

If, after all these steps, the person still doesn't fulfill the valid expectation, we may need to simply forgive and release them from the expectation. This may be the only path forward to gain peace of mind. However, this may mean:

- Honor the individual despite unmet expectations. This may involve finding anything to celebrate — expressing encouraging words and demonstrating positive actions toward them (such as serving them, offering gifts, etc.).
- Recognizing and genuinely celebrating what the person is doing — telling them how what they *are* doing well makes you feel.
- Regardless of the nature of the relationship, there will often be negative effects for all involved because of the unmet expectation. However, peace of mind is available through forgiveness, releasing the expectation, and entrusting the outcomes to Jesus.

**NOTE: Releasing an expectation from an employee who is not fulfilling their agreed upon job description may include having to release them from the job.*

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

What expectation have you been holding onto that you need to simply release from the person?

Invalid expectations of others and our circumstances come from unhealthy assumptions. Ensuring that our expectations are known, realistic, spoken, and accepted will guard against frustration, disappointment, bitterness, and anger. To have peace of mind, we must accept that the outcomes may not work out how we feel like they should. Ultimately, this means we release our desire to control our circumstances and the people in our lives. This release will lead to peace of mind and lower our relational anxiety.

ACTIVATION STEPS

No matter the type of relationship, establish a regularly scheduled “Expectations Meeting” with your spouse*, family*, or team. This meeting provides a space for open communication, allowing everyone to share their thoughts, clarify upcoming events, celebrate wins, and review challenges. It should also be a time to set clear expectations and develop practical next steps, ensuring everyone understands their role and responsibility.

**NOTE: If the relationship is a family or marriage, create a fun name for this meeting (ours is simply called “Family Meeting” and we have it every Monday morning. Also, the “wins” and “losses” can be creatively titled (examples: “Roses and Thorns”, “Happies and Crappies”, “Wheat and Weeds” – from Matthew 13.24-43). Finally, these wins and losses can be a catalyst for praying for each other — turning them into praises and prayer requests.*

MAKE IT HEALTHY

(A Checklist for Making Healthy Expectation)

☐ **Step #1: Make It Known**

- *What is it exactly you want done?*
- *What steps are involved in fulfilling this expectation?*

☐ **Step #2: Make It Realistic**

- *Does the person have the capability to fulfill this expectation? Why or how?*
- *Does this expectation fit within the time AND responsibility of their job?*

☐ **Step #3: Make It Spoken**

- *Have you clearly communicated this expectation in person AND writing?*

☐ **Step #4: Make It Accepted**

- *Did the person agree verbally AND in writing to the time, tasks, responsibility, and consequences of this expectation?*

