

Excerpt from *Beyond Expectations: Finding Joy In Your Marriage*

By Nancy Sebastian Meyer (Copyright Protected)

CHAPTER ONE: HEAR MY HEART

I punched the garage door opener and twisted the key in the ignition with a vengeance. Trying to swallow the lump in my throat, I impatiently waited for the door to clear my exit. "Why bother with a seatbelt? If anything happens to me, I wouldn't be missed."

I jerked backwards into the inky night, hit the remote button by habit to lower the garage door, and squealed my tires in a frantic rush to leave the house--and the conflicts with my husband. He always won every disagreement. I always caved in, eventually finding myself at the same point. "Okay, it's my fault. I'm a jerk," I'd say, playing the part of the victim. And on very rare occasions I'd run away--not for long, not far.

Complying with the stop sign at the end of our quiet street, I sat trembling, with tears running down my cheeks and my hands clenching the steering wheel. Where could I go? Names of people ran through my mind. But at eleven o'clock at night, I could think of no one who would be interested in taking me in, let alone know what to do with me. After all, a women's Sunday school teacher is supposed to have it all together. Yeah, like her marriage! Did I really want anyone to see me like this? Did I want to reveal how horrible my marriage had become--how frustrated and trapped I felt?

I had been down this road before--literally. When everything caved in on me, I'd tried to run away once or twice. But I never got further than this stop sign. Not more than one sensible alternative existed. I married the man, now I had to live with him. I tried to rationalize with myself. "He's really not so awful. As a matter of fact, the problems in the marriage aren't all his fault. True, he's hard to please. But that's a big part of my problem. I promise more than I can follow through on. He's never satisfied. I'm always wrong." I took a deep breath and sighed.

I thought back a few minutes to our heated discussion. Rich was angry with me...for umpteen reasons...some spoken, others just hanging in the air between us. "I can't live like this anymore. I can't do anything to please him. Something's always wrong." I rested my head on the steering wheel. "He clearly

doesn't need me...with all my weaknesses and problems. Somebody else, with more consistency, would do a much better job washing his laundry, cooking his meals, and cleaning his house. He'd just plain be better off without me." Another thought hit me. Our insurance policy was paid up, wasn't it?

But, Becky.... Our six year old, sleeping in her little bed, was totally oblivious to my shattered world. I wanted my little sweetheart to have the best in life. She, too, needed someone with consistency. What kind of mother would she have if I died and Rich remarried? She'd get over it eventually if something happened to me. Grandma and Grandpa would help. They lived just down the street.

I looked out my car window at their house...the home where I'd grown up. Mom and Dad were probably inside right now watching the news, also oblivious to the depth of pain I was experiencing. I had always tried not to tell them too much. They would be so sad...their only child. Fresh tears ran down my cheeks. They would be so disappointed with me if they knew.

Talk about disappointment! Since an early age, my three life goals consisted of becoming a pastor's wife, teaching kindergarten, and raising twelve kids. I married a youth pastor, but he was now in the business world. I taught school for several years, but never kindergarten. And we only had one child--with little hope for any more. Furthermore, marriage was as different from my fairytale dream of "happily ever after" as a lazy summer afternoon is to a cold winter's night. Life looked pretty bleak.

I looked at the stars through my tears. "God, are You sure You don't want me in heaven right now? I'm willing to come. My marriage is a mess. I can't stand Rich, and I'm not so sure I even like myself. Please take me home." A quietness settled over me.

How long had I been sitting at the stop sign? Because traffic was virtually non-existent at this time of night, I had not been forced to move. But I had to go somewhere. Only one solution agreed with everything I knew and believed. I had to go home. I was needed. God would work things out. "Yea,

right," I thought with a remnant of bitterness, "And look how far that philosophy's gotten you so far."

I dug a tissue out of the glove box, blew my nose and wiped my face. The initial signs of anxiety had left my body. My breathing had slowed down, my face didn't feel quite so overheated, and I'd finally stopped shaking. The tension wasn't gone, but it was better. I took another deep breath. Leaving home wasn't a good solution--I really didn't want to go somewhere else. I wanted to stay right here. What I really wanted was for my husband to change. Why couldn't we like each other like we used to? His angry words and noticeable disapproval and disappointment just weren't things I wanted to live with for the rest of my life.

"God, I'm gonna need Your help here." I put the car into gear and slowly turned the car around in a neighbor's driveway. I needed to go home. Where God was calling me to do His work. In my home. With my husband. With my child. "God, I need help."

As I turned into our driveway, I hit the remote again and watched the door go up. Once in the garage, I put the car in park, climbed out, and closed the garage door. I walked into the darkened kitchen. Rich had gone to bed. Becky had been in her bed for almost three hours already. Put my elbows on the counter top, I propped my head in my hands. "God where do I go from here?"

To bed, child. Rest in me. I am the one who loves you, approves of you, and accepts you just as you are, My forgiven child. Rest now, little one.

I yawned and headed to bed.

In the first twelve years of our marriage, I was disappointed--and I was a disappointment. I learned that disappointment stems from unfulfilled expectations. My husband wasn't the prince I'd expected, and I was not able to fulfill Rich's expectations. Living up to the image of the godly wife I'd dreamed of being seemed impossible. Of course, our relationship didn't begin this way--what marriage does?

At Lancaster Bible College, I met and fell in love with my own personal Prince Charming. Our differences numbered as grains of sand on a beach. Rich came from Long Island, New York and thrived

on the concept of ministering in a metropolis (such as New York City). I grew up in Lancaster County, surrounded by Amish farms, and I loved the quiet, country life. My studies in Elementary Education fit my vision to teach school and minister in a small Lancaster County Christian school. Rich was a strong leader; I happily followed along. I talked a hundred miles a minute, and he listened. (He knew how much I talked *before* he married me--but, to adapt a phrase, "love is deaf!")

We waited until just one week after graduation to tie the knot. The day I married Rich Meyer, I saw him as everything I wanted in a husband--or at least, I reasoned, with the potential to become what I wanted him to be. Rich was called to the youth pastorate. And I, happily, felt called to be his helpmate. He was a strong, passionate, godly leader. Our talents, abilities, and spiritual gifts matched and complemented each other's. And he knew just how to make me feel w-o-n-d-e-r-f-u-l. I'd never met anyone else quite like him. We were certain of the fact that God created us for one another.

After the wedding, we began our ministry together in a church just a little over an hour from Lancaster. After the bliss of dating and courtship, the first annoying incidents that cropped up were rather easy to ignore. Growing pains. Little adjustments, I told myself. I forgave easily and continued on. To be totally honest, I'd have to tell you that Rich overlooked his share of problems with me, as well. There were funny problems--the kind that you can laugh at later--like the time I burned cookies and set off the smoke alarm, only to disconnect the battery but not realize it had to be unplugged as well. But there were also irritations, grudges, and mean words. We lived and learned.

Little things that bothered us about each other gradually intensified. After all, you can forgive a person when he does something you don't like once, even two or three times. But the nineteenth time it happens you wonder if he is really trying to change or if he doesn't care how you feel about it. After two years of serving as a youth pastor in the first church, Rich and I moved on and spent another two years in a different church's youth department.

Toward the end of this time, we took the youth group on a retreat. After we returned . . .