

# STUDY SEVEN: MANAGING PERCEPTIONS AND EXPECTATIONS

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## Definitions:

Our '*perceptions*' are the way we see reality – they may be perceptions about ourselves, the other people in our lives, our relationships, our job; they also include the way we perceive the perceptions other people or groups have about us. They influence our expectations.

Our '*expectations*' are what we expect of or from ourselves, from others, from our relationships, from our roles or job.

Perceptions and expectations are frequently inter-dependent. Often our expectations are the result of our perceptions. Sometimes our expectations, including the failure of our expectations to be filled, influence our perceptions. This also works in reverse: if other people [friends, employers, employees, family] have unrealistic expectations of us or non-real perceptions of us, they will be frequently disappointed, frustrated or annoyed with us. Similarly with perceptions: if their perception of us, and particularly of how our role should be fulfilled, is not true to reality, problems will eventually occur.

The trouble with expectations and perceptions is that when they are either unrealistic or irrational they seriously affect our behaviour, our relationships in our various roles and responsibilities, and our emotional stability. To live with unrealistic expectations and perceptions [either our own or others'] is to live with constant stress.

In our journey towards practical spirituality it is important that we discipline ourselves to have realistic expectations and perceptions about ourselves, our role, our family and friends, and of the people whom we serve in our church or community. Lack of realism will inevitably either destroy us, or cause us in some way to abuse, destroy or enslave others.

## A. THREE TRUE EXAMPLES OF UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS/PERCEPTIONS

### A.1 The missionary

A 'full-time' missionary, who had spent years training for full-time missionary service, generated a team of financial supporters who promised to give so she could be a full-time missionary, spent \$XXXX getting herself and her belongings transported to Africa, after a short time 'on the mission field' contracted an illness and became so sick that she had to come home to Australia – permanently.

In addition to her physical suffering, and her personal sadness at having to leave the work to which she was committed, she was devastated by a sense of guilt and failure. This devastation was directly related to the following perceptions/ expectations:

- a 'full-time' missionary is a missionary for ever
- when God calls you to mission work it is for ever
- the possibility she had mistaken God's 'call'
- she had wasted time and money – her own and others'
- her supporters would think that she was a failure
- she had let God and her supporters down

**Complete Section #1 in the Study Seven Worksheet now.**

### A.2 The high school student

A Year 10 student wrote an exceptionally brilliant essay for an English exam. Although she was normally a good student who did well in exams, this essay was way beyond her usual standard. From that point onwards her teachers expected that level of academic performance. From that time onwards her family [parents, aunts, uncles] loaded onto her all the professional ambitions that they themselves had failed to achieve, expecting her to become a 'professional' – a lawyer or a doctor, or some other high flying professional. In herself she knew that she was not that brilliant; good, but not that brilliant. She was brilliant enough, however, to realize that they were all rejecting the real person that she was and accepting and making much of the person they thought she was or could be.

The rejection she felt ultimately led her into gross self-rejection. She developed bulimia; she called herself 'Miss Piggy' for that is how she saw herself; she deliberately destroyed every friendship she formed because, on the basis of her own self-rejection, she could only believe that the friendship of others was fake. She avoided going to supermarkets because she did not want to impose her [in her perception] horrible appearance on the public. This self-rejection lasted for many years.

**Complete Section #2 in the Study Seven Worksheet now.**

### **A.3 The mission pastor**

A pastor of a mission church was regularly instructed by the mission headquarters [far removed from the scene] to [1] get involved in house visitation, and [2] appoint local elders in the church. The instructions included an element of displeasure and rebuke.

The pastor was already engaged in regular meaningful personal contact with numerous people ranging from children right through to geriatrics as he undertook to help them in various physical aspects of their lives. This involvement was recognized locally as a powerful testimony to both the love of God and to the love and compassion this pastor had for the people. In relation to the appointment of local elders, at that time not one of the local believers met the Scriptural qualifications. The headquarters did not ask 'why' none had been appointed.

The repetitiveness of these instructions and expectations added stress to an already difficult situation.

**Complete Section #3 of the Study Seven Worksheet now.**

### **B. LOOKING AT YOUR EXPECTATIONS AND PERCEPTIONS**

This section consists entirely of you looking at your own expectations and perceptions.

**Complete Section #4 in the Study Seven Worksheet now.**

### **C. IDENTIFYING NON-BIBLICAL EXPECTATIONS/PERCEPTIONS WITHIN THE CHURCH**

The contemporary church frequently conveys, and loads on Christians, perceptions and expectations that either

[1] simply cannot be found in the Scripture, or

[2] are the result of a wrong approach to the Scripture – for example, seeing a part out of context of the whole, or twisting Scripture to force it into a preconceived meaning.

**Complete Section #5 in the Study Seven Worksheet now.**

### **D. PERSONAL INVENTORY**

To have realistic perceptions and expectations depends on a number of factors:

The understanding we and others have of biblical truth

The understanding we and others have of our role

The understanding we and others have of our talents, abilities and spiritual gifts

The understanding we and others have of our temperament/personality

The understanding we and others have of our personal needs

If we truly understand our unique identity we will not load unrealistic perceptions and expectations upon ourselves.

If we truly understand the unique identity of others we will not load them with unrealistic perceptions and expectations.

Both of these are significant for the well being of the Kingdom community, both individually and corporately.

**Complete Section #6 in the Study Seven Worksheet now.**