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# Great Expectations

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# Great Expectations

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Todd Turner was in trouble: for the third time, his wife had threatened to leave him, and this time she meant it. And all over a dog—or so Todd said.

Todd was away from home much of the time and had bought Tracy a dog for company before the birth of their first child. After the baby's arrival, Todd wanted to get rid of the dog.

"If the dog goes, I go, too," Tracy warned.

"All right, go ahead," he told her.

And so they separated.

I met first with Tracy who gave me her side of the story. She complained that she had to share her husband with too many people. He worked late, spent three or four nights a week at the church, and visited his mother every day. Often he didn't come home for supper at all. He made her feel as if she were not needed.

"My dad never treated my mother that way," she told me. "They went everywhere together. He was always affectionate to her and generous with his compliments. But Todd," she said scathingly, "only gives me a peck on the cheek when he comes home—if he doesn't forget. As for my housekeeping and cooking and caring for the baby, he just takes them for granted!"

When I got the chance to talk with Todd, I learned that he thought Tracy should realize he loved her when he worked long and hard and provided for her.

"Shouldn't the new carpet I bought her prove my love more than a lot of kissing?" he asked. "And why does she insist on keeping that dumb dog?" he grumbled.

It was clear that their trouble was far greater than the disagreement they were having about the dog. Here were a man and woman who looked at life from very different viewpoints. Tracy wanted to reproduce the pleasant experiences of her childhood home. She wanted to go places with her husband and receive more of his attention at home.

Todd, however, had been the only child at his house, and he was free to come and go as he pleased. His mother had been satisfied with a few minutes of his time each day. Todd enjoyed this kind of life, and he was seeking to reproduce it in adulthood.

And now each felt let down by the other.

Both Todd and Tracy found it lonely living apart. They met and tried to talk things over amiably, but ended up defending their past actions. I saw them separately several times, and gradually each became a little more willing to look at the other's viewpoint. I reminded them of Philippians 2:4, "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interest of others." Slowly they came to realize that the conditions in their parents' homes could not be reproduced in their own marriage.

One day Todd said candidly, "I understand now. You're telling me I am a selfish man."

It was not easy for him to say, but he followed it up with efforts that brought the two back to the same house.

It took longer for Tracy to see her weakness. Todd kept praying for patience, and they are finally making some progress. When he tends to neglect her, she pouts. But they recognize their problem and are slowly building a life together as each learns to look to the interests of the other.

[Dr. Henry Brandt shares insights from various couples he counseled. The names and certain details in these true case histories have been changed to protect each person's identity and privacy.]