

Why?

Why does someone who loves God and loves others so faithfully get struck down with cancer?

Why?

Why does someone open fire in a crowded movie theatre killing dozens of innocent people?

Why?

Why does a tornado suddenly turn one house into a grave while sparing another home only feet away?

Why?

The question often leads people to say, "Life isn't fair." No doubt about it; life isn't fair. And many people, even people of faith, take it one step further and say, 'God isn't fair.' If God was fair the godly people wouldn't get cancer; the innocent wouldn't suffer at the hands of deranged gunmen; and 'acts of God' wouldn't indiscriminately take a life.

Why does God seem so unfair?

I've stood beside enough hospital beds, sat among grieving families and watched in bewilderment at unspeakable disasters; to know that we all ask the question.

But I always remember that God is not fair as I count fairness. And I'm glad that God is not fair because if God was fair...well we wouldn't think God was being fair.

Have you ever noticed that people only complain about things being unfair when unfair works against them? When unfairness works to my advantage, I call that fair.

I like how Andy Stanley says it in his book, *Grace*.

"How do you respond when you get more than your fair share of something good? Do you turn it down? Of course not. You are like me. You thank God and keep moving before somebody changes his mind. You've never said, "No fair! My piece is bigger than everyone else's." When it comes to fairness, we are all a bit selective."

Especially when tragedy is a part of our life we question God's fairness. After all, we think of ourselves as good, so what did we do to deserve this heartache, this tragedy, this disappointment?

One answer is found in understanding that we live in a world that is often random and unpredictable. A world in which the choices of others sometimes intersect with ours, leaving us asking God, 'Why?'

We live in a world that often leaves us thinking that God either doesn't care or isn't powerful enough to act. Whether it is because of the randomness and unpredictability of life or simply because we feel our pain is unjustified; life often leaves us questioning the fairness of God.

Maybe that is why Jesus told this parable in Matthew 20:1-16.

I want you to understand that this parable doesn't answer all our questions about why we suffer or about our perception that God is unfair; but it does tell us something very important. What's most important to understand about God is his grace.

When we read or hear this parable, we are struck by the injustice shown to the men who worked all day. We believe that they should have been treated fairly by getting more than those guys who only worked an hour.

You see, we look at the parable and question the vineyard owner's fairness. What we should really see in the parable is the vineyard owner's grace.

At least that was the meaning Jesus was looking to convey. The Kingdom of Heaven doesn't operate on fairness; the kingdom of Heaven operates on God's grace.

Think about what we deserve when it comes to the kingdom of God. Do we deserve blessing, eternal life, and peace with God? No, we don't deserve any of that. If God was fair, as we count fairness, we wouldn't deserve any of the blessings we experience each day.

God isn't fair, God is graceful.

Listen to what the Psalmist says: Psalm 103:10-12

[God] does not treat us as our sins deserve
 or repay us according to our iniquities.
 For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
 so great is his love for those who fear him;
 as far as the east is from the west,
 so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

Romans 6:23 reminds us that 'the wages of sin is death.' If God was fair that would be the end of that verse because all of us are sinners. But thanks be to God that God isn't fair! Listen to the second half of the verse: "But the gift of God [that is grace] is eternal life in Jesus our Lord."

Random tragedy and heartbreak seem to point to a God who is either detached from humanity or has no control over the world. However, the true heart of God is revealed at the spectacle that took place 2,000 years ago on a hill called Calvary.

There at the cross, God's justice called for sin to be dealt with. And in what seems the most unfair exchange of all time; God did what was unfair. God laid the sin of the world on his one and only Son so that we could experience forgiveness.

The cross doesn't seem fair. The cross was the greatest injustice in the history of the world. But the cross also reminds us that God isn't fair; but God is full of grace.

If we are completely honest, we don't want God to be fair. If God was fair he would not have sent his son to pay for our sins. And God wouldn't walk beside us daily giving us strength.

When we began this series on Questions for God, I challenged you to rethink your definition of God. Too often we have shaped our image of God based on how we answered the question why? And as is often the case, our definition of God, our understanding of God's character, often comes from our experience instead of from God's Word.

I also told you in that opening sermon that questioning God in the midst of life is ok. The key is to ask the questions with a heart open to discover who God is as revealed in the Bible.

My prayer for you throughout this series has been that in every experience of life that you would ask questions of God so that God could reveal himself to you through the Bible.

Do you remember the questions I asked at the beginning of the sermon? These are the questions of life that if asked openly and honestly should actually reveal God's grace.

So when someone you love is stricken with cancer you find that God's grace is sufficient for the journey- whether it ends in healing now or in healing at death.

Life is not fair, neither is God. But I much prefer a God who is full of grace; because when life is unfair we can always rely on God's grace.

Grace when life is hard.

Grace when life is unfair.

Grace when life leaves us with unanswered questions.