

# It's Not Fair

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There are a number of tried and true ways to ensure that your life will be full of discontent.

- If you spend more money than you make, at some point, your life is going to be full of discontent.
- If you help other people in the hopes that they will appreciate you, at some point, your life is going to be full of discontent.
- If you keep secrets from people whom you love and who love you, at some point, your life is going to be full of discontent.
- If you continually do the easy things first and save the important things for later, at some point, your life is going to be full of discontent.
- If you still wear your clothes from the 70s in public, at some point, your life is going to be filled with discontent (there is some evidence that this does not apply to professors).

The list goes on and on and on. We seem to have an unending need to be reminded of these fundamental little principles of life. Why? Especially when we've learned about some of them the hard way. Why do we seem to have this constant need to be reminded of these very practical, common-sense life principles? There could be any number of explanations. For example, it could be because we're stupid. More likely, it's because we have this amazing capacity to deceive ourselves.

To use the language that Burt introduced us to, the Small Self, or Ego, deceives us into believing that these rules don't apply to us... that we're somehow different...

I'm special. I can spend more money than I make. I can transfer this balance to this new credit card and I can consolidate these loans and that will leave me just enough to get that new car that's really a great deal because with the improved gas mileage it will pay for itself anyway.

The small self wants what it wants, when it wants it. The God-breathed Authentic Self knows that genuine contentment comes in other ways. The Small Self struggles to trust this.

This morning the prophet Habakkuk lends his voice to this Small Self-Authentic Self struggle over one of these basic life principles. And it's one of those principles that gets so much attention in scripture, that,

- 1) It must be important, and
- 2) We must have trouble getting it. Otherwise it wouldn't be such a central theme in the Bible.

And that principle is: **Life is not Fair.**

Habakkuk bemoans:

*O LORD, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not listen?*

*Or cry to you "Violence!" and you will not save?*

*Why do you make me see wrong-doing and look at trouble?*

*Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise.*

*So the law becomes slack and justice never prevails.*

*The wicked surround the righteous – therefore judgment comes forth perverted.*

Life is not fair

The rain falls on both the wicked and the righteous.

The prodigal son gets the party.

The guy who works a little gets paid the same as the guy who works a lot.

And, Jesus decides to have lunch with that stinkin' little pig Zaccheaus.

It's just not fair.

And, you know, it doesn't help any that justice is something we are supposed to seek on behalf of everyone else. We're supposed to fight against unfairness in the world, and yet accept that we cannot demand it for ourselves.

Of course, every once in a while, things do seem to work out right. Sometimes things come around in a Karmic sort of way.....

- Sometimes that idiot flies by you going 90, and you get to watch the highway patrolman pull out behind him.
- Sometimes the waitress accidentally drops a tray of drinks into the lap of that guy who won't put out his cigar.
- I've always sort of resented being short... It's not fair. Its not easy growing up in a family where the motto is "We may be small, but we're slow." But now, at this time in my life, I can look at Charlie Olson and (grab hair),
- Sometimes things have a way of evening out.

But, I want to invite us to look a little deeper at this whole fairness thing. In fact, I want to suggest that it affects most of us more than we let ourselves know, and that, for most of us, it probably functions as an idol.

Keep in mind that an idol is anything we use to soothe our anxieties or distract us from our anxieties, but which, in fact, has no power to transform our anxieties.

Our idols soothe us.

Our idols distract us.

Our idols never transform us.

And you already know this... at least intellectually you do...

Your money

Your food and your drink

Your promotions

Your lovers

Your degrees

Your workouts

Your honors.

They all can be quite soothing, and quite distracting... but never transforming.

And so what I'm asking you to consider this morning is, that fairness functions as an idol as well. I'm actually asking you to consider the possibility that you worship the idol of fairness. That you have this expectation, hovering somewhere just under the radar of consciousness, that everything could be okay if life was just fair. You may have even come to believe that you are actually entitled to fairness.

Reality tells us that fairness has no place in the world at large.

- The latest figures indicate that over 30,000 children die of hunger every day.
- Many people who take excellent physical care of themselves are diagnosed with cancer.
- A drunk driver crosses the road at that one split second necessary to hit the family van.

We need to believe that somehow things make sense, and we can come up with these very interesting theologies to make things fit.

- There must be sin in her life.
- God is trying to teach him something.

- Karma.... that's what it is... it's Karma.

No, what it is, is idolatry. Instead of wrestling with the reality of life in a very chaotic world, we come up with concepts that are aimed at removing the mystery. And when the chaos breaks in on us, we distract ourselves from the fear and grief of it all by demanding explanations.

It's so understandably human to want those explanations. It's so understandably human to want to believe we can count on fairness. It's usually our anger and depression, though, that let us know we've begun to move fairness over into the idol category. And when that happens we are in danger of losing the opportunity for spiritual growth that comes only when we are willing to sit with the Mystery.

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When Burt came to DaySpring many moons ago he began the tradition of the Lectionary breakfast. Every Friday interested persons gathered to discuss with Burt what he was doing with his sermon for the upcoming Sunday. He would talk about the general shape the sermon had been taking, and then invited discussion. He found this process to be invaluable.

I've never been able to attend the Lectionary breakfast because I see clients Friday mornings, but the idea is so great that I decided to create my own Lectionary committee for this sermon. I wrote a few friends from around the country and from here in Waco whom I thought might be willing to play along. I gave them the texts for the day, told them my initial thoughts, and asked for their comments. I received back a number of helpful ideas.

One of the persons is a friend, a woman, who suffered through the death of her child a few years ago. Although I knew she'd never had any formal theological training, I knew that she was a person of great depth, so I wanted you to hear her reflections on the passages. What she sent me is a better sermon than anything I can construct.

With her permission, I offer her words to you:

**For me, the most difficult part of my spiritual trauma was the feeling that God turned away from our family when we needed Him most. There was an earnest seeking in the midst of our crisis, a seeking of His guidance and His will and it seemed He just wasn't listening. When Habakkuk cries, "*O LORD, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not listen?*" I understand his anger.**

**Then, as our crisis built and the worst happened, I could not make sense of the unfairness of it all. I had prayed and prayed, sought wise counsel, both spiritual and medical, and still God allowed the worst to happen. Why wasn't He listening to our pleas for help? The prophet asks, "*Why do you ignore me, and then make me look at all these perversions?*" This seemed the greatest injustice of all.**

**I don't understand the why of it, but I do think it is significant that I had to spend so long wrestling with the idea that God doesn't intervene and stop the destruction sometimes... The image of the writer at the watchpost, determined not to leave until he has answers to his complaint, feels so familiar. Funny he's at a watchpost or a rampart...like he thinks he can defend against more destruction if he is just more alert....**

**I felt that way too, I had to get answers, understand so that I could prevent it from happening again. But all the while I was petrified with fear knowing that I really am powerless. When the rules are broken, and there's no explanation for why you were the target, and not someone else, it is terrifying. You feel you can't count on anything you knew before.**

**So you struggle and struggle with the concept of how your loving God could allow things to be so unfair, and then, when God finally does answer, He doesn't give you specifics. He tells you that, yes, even though it is chaotic and unfair and life has ripped your heart out in shreds, there is a bigger story in process...we can only see our chapter, not the end. It's like there's this infinite peaceful current that encompasses all the injustice, the chaos and the pain and moves it all along towards the final destination of restoration....but I can't see it because I'm in the middle of my own storm being pulled under by the undertow.**

**The faith part is in choosing to believe that's true... in deciding that, despite the pain, and my inability to see how all this belongs, I will trust He is still moving all this awfulness to redemption. That choice to trust again is so hard.... I trusted Him once and my life fell apart. But the faith this time is less about my sense of security or any particular expectations and more about believing in His grace to move all this to a peaceful end...or perhaps a better way to describe it is a new beginning.... In those times when I don't see or feel Him near it has helped me to remember Christ on the cross when He felt abandoned by God.... if Christ's moment of feeling all alone belongs then surely mine can too....It's my decision to trust in His far-reaching grace that gives me some measure of peace even in my brokenness.**

**My story starts as someone with an earnest faith in a loving God....  
Whose crisis left her feeling alone and abandoned....  
Her long struggle to understand, and then finally  
to understand that she can't understand.**

**The acceptance that life isn't fair, but God still has the ultimate process of redemption on track had to move from her head to her heart...**

**The most difficult step was making the choice to believe that regardless of how things looked or felt, He was moving her forward in love. The hurt was still there, but once she started trusting in His grace the peace began to come...**

Now, I'm pretty sure that this woman can wake up on some mornings and hardly believe she was ever able to write words like this. I'm pretty sure that she has plenty of moments where she feels washed back down to the bottom of hill, and wants to scream at God for not coming up with a better plan.

But somewhere along the way, she decided that fairness was not going to be one of her idols, and she opened her soul to some new, grace-filled possibilities.

Is it time for you to consider such a choice?

Amen.

*"Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves. Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is to live everything. Live the questions"*

*Rainer Maria Rilke*