

GROWTHguide

FOR THE WEEK OF JAN. 10, 2015

"Live Can Seem Unfair, But It Really Isn't"



THIS WEEK'S SCRIPTURES

Matthew 20:1-16, 1 Corinthians 3:8, Colossians 2:6-8, James 1:17

REFLECTION AND STUDY

DAY 1

Read the parable Jesus tells in Matthew 20:1-16. There was a group hired at the beginning of the work shift who were promised a denarius. Each group of workers hired after that were only promised "Whatever is right." We would expect the later in the day you were hired, the less you would be paid. But the laborers who were hired last received a full denarius, the wages expected for a full day's work. You can imagine what they felt when the workers who had been working the full day saw those hired towards the end of the day were paid a full wage. We have all experienced this feeling when you think you made the greater sacrifice or were involved longer or more invested and someone else comes along with little or no time or investment, and you both receive the same treatment. It can seem very unfair.

- Think about a situation in your life that you felt was unfair. Why did you feel this situation was unfair?
- Why does it matter to us how others are treated in comparison to ourselves?

DAY 2

The landowner in yesterday's parable was extremely generous, giving many of the workers wages beyond what they expected. But the laborers who had been there all day could not see his generosity, too focused on themselves and would be "fair" to them. Those who had worked all day begin not by objecting to the grace others had received, but by expecting that they themselves were entitled to receive more. When they receive the just fulfillment of their contract, exactly what they were promised, they object not to what they have in fact received, but that others have been made "equal" to them.

- The other workers received a blessing. Why did the workers who had been there the longest feel so angry that others received a gift of generosity?
- Do you compare yourself to others?
- Have you ever felt that someone else received something they did not deserve?
- Why did you feel you had the right to decide who is deserving of generosity?

DAY 3

The parable from Matthew is a lesson on gratitude. The parable is not about salvation or gaining eternal life, because salvation is not earned by works. Nor is the parable about rewards for service, because God will reward believers differently according to their service. **Read 1 Corinthians 3:8.** If we think that we deserve something because of our time, diligence, and commitment to service, we have negated the real value of what we have done. All who respond to the grace of God in Jesus' kingdom invitation are equal disciples, and we must be careful not to measure our worth by what we have done and what we have sacrificed versus what another has done.

- How do you measure your worth?

Pray and ask God to help you to focus on the value of what we have done without comparing ourselves to others.

DAY 4

Instead of being motivated by “fairness” or reward, the most noble of motivations is gratitude. The profound significance of gratitude is that it impacts not just the one toward whom we should be grateful but all other relationships as well. Harold Hoehner contends, ***“Believers’ motivation in this life should not be the obtaining of rewards as an end in itself. Our motivation should be to please God wholeheartedly in thankfulness for what he has done for us through Christ.”***

- What motivates your actions? Why do you follow Christ?

Say a prayer of thanks to God. Start with thanking Him for what He has done for you through Christ, then think about what other blessings or gifts God has given you and add those to your prayer.

DAY 5

When we receive a blessing or we are at a good place in our lives it can be easier to be grateful. But what about in the bad times? There is a Jewish proverb that says we will never know all that we should be grateful to God for. Only God knows for sure what will turn out to produce good. Have you ever gone through something difficult and painful, something that caused you or someone you loved suffering, and had something good come from it? Maybe you learned something, maybe your strength or your faith grew, maybe you met someone who had a powerful impact on you. Have you ever looked back on a difficult time and said, “God, I’m so grateful I didn’t miss that.”

- Try to think of a difficult thing that happened in your life that you are grateful for.
- What is the good thing that came out of that painful situation?

Pray and ask God to help you see all your blessings. Thank Him for something you might not have realized was a blessing at the time.

DAY 6

As Psalm 24 says, *“The earth is the LORD’s and the fullness thereof.”* The key to living a life of gratitude is remembering this: Everything is a gift. If you count God’s blessings, you will not be able to number them. The human race is naturally entitled: we believe our gifts rightfully belong to us. The more we think we’re entitled to, the less we will be grateful for. Gratitude is not something we can force ourselves to feel. What we need is a perspective shift to see that we are not entitled to what we have, we are **gifted** it. Once we understand this, our hearts will naturally be filled with gratitude! Read James 1:17.

Make a list of at least five things you’re grateful for. Maybe they’re things you listed in yesterday’s prayer. When you are feeling angry or like life is unfair take a moment and thank God for these things. You might find that each time you do this, you are able to add more things to the list as you begin to see more of your gifts.

DAY 7

Today is your “Sabbath” and a time for reflection. How has God been speaking to you over the week? Use what the Lord has said to you to remold and reshape your life. If you are having trouble hearing God’s voice, slow down or even stop what you are doing so that the busyness of life’s demands do not squelch the whispers of God’s language of love upon your heart.