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## THE “IT’S NOT FAIR” SYNDROME

“He doesn’t deserve that.”

“That’s just wrong!”

“This is horrible! It’s just not right!”

“What’s happening doesn’t make any sense. I simply don’t understand.”

“Someone else is getting the credit that really belongs to me.”

“I always get the short end of the stick.”

“I didn’t do anything wrong, but I’m still being criticized.”

No matter what words we use to express this kind of confused disbelief, we’re saying the same thing: “It’s not fair.”

I’ve been involved in biblical counseling for over forty years. In that length of time, God has allowed me the privilege of helping many people with their problems. Some just wanted to make sure they understood the right (godly) thing

to do in a certain situation or relationship. Others had more complex problems that needed more rigorous counseling. And many others had serious issues that required intensive work and prayer to resolve—things such as enslavement to pornography, to drugs or alcohol, or to other forms of immorality. Some counselees were suicidal, others homicidal. Some had long-standing problems of bizarre behavior, depression, or violence. My wife and I have also worked with victims of rape, incest, abandonment, and domestic violence. Nothing surprises me anymore.

There's been a recurring theme throughout my ministry, most commonly expressed as some version of "this is just not fair." It is my hope and prayer that this book will serve those who have asked these questions—whether aloud or to themselves. I think we've all been guilty of this sinful attitude at one time or another. We've heard it over and over. Sometimes we hear it from:

- a person who is angry or depressed about life
- people with physical deformities or limitations
- someone asked to do more than someone else is doing
- someone experiencing hard times when others seem to be gliding happily through life
- someone who is punished for doing something others seem to be getting away with
- those who see everything turn to gold for others while they themselves never seem to catch a break
- the person who gets passed over for promotion even though he thinks he was better qualified
- a person who has just lost a loved one or has just been diagnosed with a serious illness

- the one who gets paid less than someone else for doing the same job
- a single person who remains alone while others find love
- a young woman unable to conceive while others become pregnant without any problem
- a wife whose husband left her for a younger woman after 35 years of marriage
- unhappy parents whose children turned out badly while their friends' kids can do no wrong

“It’s not fair” can take many forms, you see. If you listen carefully, you’ll hear this statement made by numerous people in the Bible.

- Rachel said it when her sister Leah had children and she didn’t.
- The elder brother said it when his father gave the returning prodigal a royal party.
- The Jews said it when they grumbled against God in the wilderness.
- Job said it when he experienced Satan’s attacks.
- Jeremiah said it when he was oppressed because of his message of destruction.

Basically, we utter this statement when we believe we are not being treated fairly. Sometimes we are angry at other people, and sometimes we’re angry about situations or circumstances. Ultimately, we are angry with God, regardless of how well we disguise it—even to ourselves.

I know a woman who insisted that she was not angry with God but instead felt betrayed and hurt by Him. She tried

everything she could to keep from admitting that she was mad at God. We talked about it at length. And there, at the bottom of the exploration into her feelings and attitudes, lay an intense anger toward God, which the young woman confessed and for which she immediately repented. Once this was accomplished, we quickly moved through the circumstances that had brought her to me in the first place. God gave her grace to resolve her “heart problems” and move on to constructive change.

If you are struggling with sinful thoughts, attitudes, and actions, you, like this young woman, will probably find this “it’s not fair” syndrome at the root of your problems. Nothing will produce more anger, resentment, bitterness, doubts, bad behavior, divorce, immorality, cruelty, violence, unhappiness, and depression than the idea that you’re experiencing something unfair.

What can we do once we recognize that we have a problem in this area? We must counteract this attitude with helpful biblical truth. Nothing will be more useful than revisiting the glorious truths about various aspects of God’s character. Once we saturate our minds with these magnificent attributes of our loving Father, we will find that it will not only affect our sinful attitudes, but will also affect the way we handle the consequences of our difficulties.

Sometimes, when our hearts are aching, we may think that what we need is the loving embrace of a compassionate friend. And sure, that helps us feel better. But it’s only a temporary sensation. What actually moves us past our self-absorbed sorrow is a generous dose of solid biblical teaching on the following attributes of God:

- His wisdom
- His love
- His sovereignty
- His justice

Some of you may think this book needs to focus more deeply on the pain of suffering. You might be seeking more compassion than these pages provide. And yes, I know how it feels to have my heart broken. My wife and I have experienced hardships and personal losses. So please don't think I'm separated from your personal depth of suffering. No matter how hard you prepare for a crisis, I know how much it hurts to go through it.

“But thinking through the theology of suffering, and resolving in advance how you will respond, however praiseworthy the exercise, cannot prepare you for the shock of suffering itself. It is like jumping into a bitterly cold lake; you can brace yourself for the experience all day, but when you actually jump in the shock to your system will snatch your breath away.”<sup>1</sup>

Compassion is critical when we're hurting. But compassion alone will not help us move past the emotions that can cloud our thinking. This book is not intended to be one long, comforting group hug. It's meant to teach and instruct with biblical truths that will help more than fifty good hugs!

“It is through exposure to His Truth that you can find peace in the midst of trouble, hope in the midst of trial and trust in the midst of chaos. If God gives us the grace to knit our will to His, we can find contentment—even in the face of adversity.”<sup>2</sup>

For some of you, this book will be a reminder of the truths you've already learned. For others, this may be the first time you've experienced this kind of focused instruction on these vitally important attributes of Almighty God.



“My Times Are in Thy Hand”

My times are in thy hand;  
My God, I wish them there;  
My life, my friends, my soul, I leave  
Entirely to thy care.

My times are in thy hand,  
Whatever they may be;  
Pleasing or painful, dark or bright,  
As best may seem to thee.

My times are in thy hand;  
Why should I doubt or fear?  
My Father's hand will never cause  
His child a needless tear.

My times are in thy hand,  
Jesus the Crucified;  
Those hands my cruel sins had pierced  
Are now my guard and guide.

—*William F. Lloyd, 1824*

## REFLECTION, APPLICATION, AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Do you agree that the “it’s not fair” attitude is a very common one among human beings? Why?
2. What kinds of problems does the “it’s not fair” attitude produce? Why are these problems so serious?
3. What are some of the circumstances in which people are prone to respond with an “it’s not fair” attitude?
4. What biblical illustrations of people who manifested this attitude were mentioned in this chapter? Describe what was going on in their lives at the time.
5. Can you think of any other people in the Bible who demonstrated this attitude? Describe their circumstances at the time.
6. Do you ever find yourself thinking in terms of “I don’t deserve this” or “Why am I being treated this way?” Describe the circumstances in which you have manifested or are manifesting this attitude.
7. What should we do when we recognize that we have a problem in this area? What do we really need in order to overcome this destructive attitude?