

Is Life Fair?

Job 1:6-12

August 15, 2021

We learn of the unfairness of life early in our lives. We try to do all the right things; but somehow adverse things happen and we suffer.

We take antioxidants and stay away from preservatives and known carcinogens, and eat only the organic food, but still get cancer. We exercise regularly and watch what we eat, but still come down with a heart disease. Life happens. You work harder than anyone else in the team; but someone else gets credit and gets promoted, and you are still stuck in the same old place. Not only that, but if something goes wrong, you are the one who faces unemployment. Life is so unfair.

Life is unfair from its beginning. Some are born into good families. Some are not as fortunate. We are born into different families, different environments, and a different culture. We grew up in different settings. We had different kinds of parents. We are born with different interests and talents. We had different educations and with that, we had different opportunities. Some have different genetic dispositions, which make things more complicated. Life is not fair. It has never been fair and it will never be. We may have similar or even equal basic human rights but our lives are far from being equal.

The Bible states that God does not want us to suffer. In fact, God says, “I will make with them (the children of God) an everlasting covenant. I will not turn away from doing good to them; and I will put the fear (or reverence) of me in their hearts, that they may not turn away from me. I will rejoice in doing them good...”¹ So, if God wants good things for us, why is it that bad things happen to us?

We live in a world that is saturated with greed, selfishness, foolishness, and evil. God has given humanity a freedom of choice. Sometimes people choose to do bad things, even awful things. Sometimes mistakes happen; accidents happen. Some of them happen to us. Tragedies, illnesses, crimes, divorces, death of loved ones, and failures – bad things do happen to us whether we deserve it or not.

God allows humanity to choose their actions and deal with their consequences. The freedom to choose our behaviors and actions was God’s design for humanity. Whether the choice is good or bad, God rarely intervenes in human

¹ Jeremiah 32:40-41.

behaviors and actions, and because of that we have evil and injustice in the world. To prevent or minimize the evil and injustice, we come up with all kinds of laws and regulations to control human behaviors. But laws and regulations cannot control all of the human behaviors. So evil and injustice continue.

In order to survive in this world, we ask, “How can we cope with the injustice and unfairness of life?” The Biblical character Job might be one of the persons who dealt with the most severe unfairness of life in human history. In the Bible, God describes Job as a “blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil.”² Not many people are described as blameless and righteous in the Bible but Job happens to be one of them. Yet he becomes a victim of divine scrutiny.

Satan challenges God that if God removes all his blessings from Job, then he will surely curse God to his face.³ God takes that challenge and removes all his protections from Job. In a matter of days Job loses everything: his children, his possession, his wife, his health, and his friends’ trust.

Job’s suffering is severe, almost indescribable, and his friends try to find some reasonable causes for his sufferings. They believe that his sufferings must be caused by his sins, perhaps some hidden sins. Job tries to defend himself and his righteousness. It is a struggle and heartbreaking to defend himself to say the least.

The interesting thing is that at the end of the story God reveals himself to Job and gives him a glimpse of his awesome power but God does not give Job any reason or explanation for his sufferings. He simply states how awesome God’s power and wisdom are, and how unreasonable it is for Job to question his authority.

In a way God is telling Job that there are many things in our lives, and our experiences, that we simply cannot understand. His point is even if he explains them to us; we will not be able to understand them.

But when we suffer, isn’t it natural for us to ask, “Why is this happening to us?” However, even if we know the reason, will it make any difference? Perhaps the better question to ask may be, “How should we deal with it when it happens?”

For the coping strategy, I want to suggest a couple of things.

² Job 1:8.

³ Job 1:11.

One: Let us remember that life is unfair but God remains good and faithful. We can cope with great suffering and unfairness and still have an abundant and fulfilling life if we know that God is good and faithful to us. We can face great challenges in life if we know that God loves us and leads and guides us through the storms of life.

The German protestant reformer Martin Luther had six children with his wife Katharina von Bora. When one of their sons died, his wife Katharina shouted at him, “Where was God when our son died?” Luther responded saying, “The same place he was when his Son died. He was there watching and weeping.” In the midst of our sufferings God is there with us and suffers with us. God knows what we go through. He understands our sufferings.

But do you know something? God doesn’t just understand our pain. He doesn’t just stay with us and suffer with us. He is the God of resurrection. God is the God of life. God is the God of new hope. Just as God brought the resurrection after his Son died, he can also make sure that the last pictures of our lives will not be about unfairness and sufferings, but about victory and grace. So, while we recognize that life is unfair, let us remember that God remains good and faithful.

Two: Let us stay close to the Lord especially when we are afflicted. When we are suffering our faith can easily be shaken. Doubts creep in and make us wonder if God really cares. That is one of Satan’s most effective strategies. He tries to separate us from God, the very source of our hope and strength.

Pastor Pierce Harris, a former preacher in Atlanta, Georgia, lost his wife in tragic car accident. A few weeks after the funeral, a well-meaning gentleman sent him a note. The note said, “I hope your terrible loss will not destroy your faith.” I am sure the man meant it well. Pastor Harris reflected on that and later commented to someone else saying, “I have lost enough already without throwing my faith away. Why should I cast aside the only thing that is keeping me afloat?”⁴ Isn’t that a great confession of faith? “I have lost enough already without throwing away my faith. Why should I cast away the only thing that keeps me going and alive?”

Pastor Harris is right. When we suffer for whatever reason we need to stay close to the Lord. King David, in one of his psalms, declared, “The Lord is faithful

⁴ Bill Bouknight, “Why Is Life So Unfair?” It is from his sermon based on Romans 8:28-39.

to all his promises and loving toward all he has made. The Lord is near to all who call on him.”⁵

One of the things that comforts us in the days of trial is other people’s confession of faith. The stories of other people who went through difficulties in their own days and how they coped with them often give us strength for our own journey. Charles A. Tindley (1851-1933) was a Methodist minister. He grew up in Maryland. After the Civil War (1861-1865) he moved to Philadelphia. Although he was a free man, his life was filled with difficulties. Later he became a minister and wrote a wonderful hymn called, Stand By Me. It is in our hymnal. It is number 512.

When the storms of life are raging, stand by me;
When the world is tossing me, like a ship upon the sea,
Thou who rulest wind and water, stand by me.

In the midst of tribulation, stand by me;
When the host of hell assails, and my strength begins to fail,
Thou who never lost a battle, stand by me.

In the midst of faults and failures, stand by me;
When I’ve done the best I can, and my friends misunderstand,
Thou who knowest all about me, stand by me.

In the midst of persecution, stand by me;
When my foes in war array undertake to stop my way,
Thou who saved Paul and Silas, stand by me.

When I am growing old and feeble, stand by me;
When my life becomes a burden, and I’m nearing chilly Jordan,
O Thou, Lily of the Valley, stand by me.⁶

My friends, even when life treats us unfairly and we suffer, God who stands by us will sustain us. He will hold us and keep us until we see him face to face. So let us remember that he is good and faithful. Let us remember to stay close to him.

⁵ Psalm 145:13b, 18.

⁶ United Methodist Hymnal #512