

That's Not Fair!

[Jesus said,] “So the last will be first, and the first will be last” (Matthew 20:16).

Scripture: Matthew 20:1, 6-16

Song: “When Jesus Comes to Reward”

“That’s not fair!” one of the kids in my class exclaimed as I gave another child a fidget toy. (I didn’t have enough for everyone.) Fairness is important to children, but they don’t always fully understand what fairness is. The child I gave the toy to needed it to focus, while the child without the toy was doing fine without help. Sometimes fairness isn’t about everyone getting the same thing but about everyone getting what they need.

The laborers in the today’s parable didn’t quite understand fairness either. They thought it was unfair that the laborers who came to work later in the day received the same pay as they did. They didn’t comprehend the landowner’s generosity to the laborers who had come last.

In the end, there will be people who have served God in different ways for shorter and longer periods of time, yet God will see fit to give each the same reward: eternal life. If we fill our hearts with happiness for all who will receive God’s generous gift, we will be more in tune with God’s heart and character.

Father, You understand what is fair. Help me to rejoice when I see Your generosity toward others. In Jesus’ name, amen.

January 30–February 5. **Tina Clark** has a passion to help followers of Jesus use their gifts and talents for God’s service. In her spare time, she enjoys cycling, walking through nature, and snuggling with her cats.

A Two-Way Street

The LORD confides in those who fear him; he makes his covenant known to them (Psalm 25:14).

Scripture: Psalm 25:1-15

Song: “God Speaking”

One of the teens I worked with was going through a tough time. I noticed she was upset, so I walked into the room with her and sat down. As we talked, I began to get a picture of what was going on. A lot of her struggles reminded me of my own, so I told her a bit about myself and the things I had struggled with. As I confided in her, she felt more comfortable confiding in me, and we had an encouraging talk.

My relationship with that teen was not a one-way street. Neither is our relationship with God. We often think about how we confide in God, but God also confides in us. He has told us about His covenant—how He promises forgiveness of sins and eternal life through the sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus. He has told us what He has done for us, what He expects from us, and what He will do.

Knowing these things, our relationship with God deepens. God has not left us in the dark about His plans. Because of this, we can be assured of our future with Him. We can rest in the security and peace of that assurance, rejoicing that the God we confide in sees fit to confide in us.

Father, as we confide in You, let us feel joy and peace that You confide in us. You will never lead us astray. In Jesus' name, amen.

A Mountaintop Perspective

When I consider your heavens, . . . what [are] human beings that you care for them? (Psalm 8:3-4).

Scripture: Psalm 8

Song: “Indescribable”

As my friend and I reached the mountaintop, tired and out of breath, we gazed out in awe at the view. We could see the whole valley from where we stood. And although we knew that people hustled and bustled about below, they were too small for us to see. My friend remarked at how amazing it is that although we are so small, God still cares about us.

When we consider the universe and contemplate the creation—how incredible, how vast, how beautiful it is—it’s truly a wonder that God is mindful of us. We may ask, as David did, *Who am I in comparison to such an array of splendor that God cares for me?* The answer is that we are His beloved children and God sees us to the depths of our hearts.

The next time we pause to gaze at God’s handiwork, as we appreciate how amazing it is, we can bring to mind that the God who created it all sees us. Doing so can help fill us with assurance of His love, security in His care, and gratitude for His goodness. We can know for certain that no matter how small or insignificant we may feel in comparison, our God loves us and cares about us.

Father, Your handiwork is incredible! When I feel small and insignificant in this world, I will remember that You fashioned my heart (Psalm 33:15) and care deeply for my soul. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Letting Others Shine

The LORD declares, . . . “I will raise up your offspring. . . . He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever” (2 Samuel 7:11-13).

Scripture: 2 Samuel 7:1, 4-17

Song: “Thy Will”

While I loved working with kids at church, when one particular role was offered to me, I had to pray quite fervently about it. Part of me really wanted to do it, but there was something holding me back. I realized that the position was not for me, that someone else would really shine in that role.

David had a desire to build a temple for the Lord, but it would not be his job. He was a man of war and would not be suited to building the temple (1 Chronicles 28:3). This job would instead be given to his son Solomon. But God did not leave David without a promise. He promised to establish his house forever.

Throughout our lives many opportunities are presented to us. Some are meant for us, and some will be for others. In prayerfulness we can discern which is which. It may be hard to let an opportunity pass us by, but there are times when we need to step aside so someone else can shine. However, God will not leave us empty-handed. The opportunities that we let go will make the ones that are for us all the sweeter.

Father, help me to discern Your will so that I know what is for me. Thank You that what You have for me is best. In Jesus' name, amen.

Why Us?

King David . . . said: “Who am I, Sovereign LORD, and what is my family, that you have brought me this far?” (2 Samuel 7:18).

Scripture: 2 Samuel 7:18-29

Song: “Who Am I?”

After Typhoon Haiyan ripped through the Philippines, Suzie and Carl Miller walked through the City of Tacloban’s devastated streets. They knew it was only by God’s grace that they had miraculously survived the devastation that took the lives of many others.

In our own lives, we may wonder why we made it through something difficult or why God has blessed us. David wondered the same kinds of things. Who was *he* that God had brought him through the difficulties of his life and bestowed upon him the honor of kingship? Who was *he* that his family would never cease to have someone on the throne? His response to this question was not one of guilt or shame, nor did he try to conjure a list of his own qualifications. He simply praised his incredible, powerful God (2 Samuel 7:22).

How often God has protected us, provided for us, and blessed us! Not because of our own merit but because we serve a mighty and loving God. Not because of what *we* have done but because of who *He* is. As we reflect on these things today, we can more deeply value how blessed we are to belong to Him.

Father, You have brought us through so much and given us so much. We thank You that You do this not because *we* are good but because *You* are. In Jesus’ name, amen.

The Power of the Cross

The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God (1 Corinthians 1:18).

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 1:18-24

Song: “There Is Power”

I sat in my college class, stunned. “Anyone who believes that God created the world is stupid,” the professor said. I knew I was in for a long semester. However, I listened to what the professor taught, doing my best not to compromise my own beliefs. I wrote a message at the end of the last exam, thanking him for teaching me. He caught me in the hallway one day and told me, “What you wrote was the nicest thing anyone has ever said to me.”

While the message of the cross seemed like foolishness to my professor, it still held its power to impact him through a kindness shown to him for Christ’s sake. To those who don’t know God, to be told that one Savior died for the sins of all and that Jesus is not dead but alive seems “out there” to them. However, to us, there is power in the resurrection—power to save us and help us live godly lives.

The message of the cross retains its power through all generations. We can be confident that God will touch people—even the most unlikely—in profound ways through it. As we share that message, we can anticipate the amazing work God will do through it.

Father, soften our hearts toward those who don’t know You, and deliver the message of the cross to them through us. In Jesus’ name, amen.

The Underdogs

God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong (1 Corinthians 1:27).

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 1:25-31

Song: “You Are My All in All”

It was the game that would decide the 1985 college basketball title; the Villanova Wildcats faced the Georgetown Hoyas. The Hoyas had beaten the Wildcats in two previous games, but that did not discourage the underdogs. With Villanova’s six-foot-nine-inch Ed Pickney guarding Georgetown’s seven-foot-tall Patrick Ewing, the Wildcats finished out this historic game with a victory.

Villanova was the lowest seed ever to win the NCAA championship. They were underdogs, counted out at the beginning of the tournament. In today’s passage, the apostle Paul talks about underdogs. These are people the world sees as weak or foolish, the ones counted out. However, God is able to take the weak and fill them with His strength. In this way, no one can boast and say that they made it all on their own.

In some respects we may feel like underdogs. We may feel we’re never going to be of any use or significance. Yet it’s those who are weak in the world’s estimation—the underdogs—that God chooses to bring near to himself, to bring glory to His name. Our weakness may be mocked and despised by the world. We may be deemed worthless by the world’s standards, but we are chosen and precious in God’s sight, raised up to serve the King of kings.

Father, You are my strength when I am weak. Be my strength today. In Jesus’ name, amen.