



“The Bonus”

Matthew 20

Small Group Plan

It's December of 2011. Unitron had experienced record profits during 2011 and it was time for the yearly bonuses to be given so the Owner met with the sales team. Brent had worked with Unitron for the past 15 years and the company had always given out great bonuses on top of the guaranteed salary.

First, Jenny, the newby was called up. She had real potential, but had only come on a few months back. The boss told her he looked forward to her being with Unitron for years to come, and handed her a bonus check of \$37,000.

She was speechless. For someone who has just come on board, she couldn't believe that she was getting this kind of bonus. But, as the Owner said, the company had never been seen profits like 2011. Brent thought to himself, this is going to be the best day ever. I've never in my 15 years with Unitron gotten a bonus for 37K.

Then, the Owner called Rajib to the front. Rajib had been with the company for a few years and was second only to Brent. The Owner thanked Rajib for being a reliable part of the team and handed him a check, also for \$37,000.

Rajib thanked the Owner, but as he walked by Brent he said, “I've never gotten a bonus this big, but what's the deal with the new girl getting just as much as me?”

Then, the Owner asked Brent to come to the front. He said, “Brent, Unitron has never had a salesman who brought in as much business as you. You have worked longer and harder than anyone else in the company. On behalf of myself, the CEO and the Board, thank you for helping build this company. I know we've never given you a bonus this big, but I hope next year's will be even bigger. Here's your bonus check for \$37,000.

Brent felt numb and was speechless for a moment as he stared down at the check. But then his blood began to boil. Sure it was a bigger check than he had expected, but in his mind, it was borderline criminal to give Jenny what's-her-name, who got hired back in September, the same bonus. He had been with Unitron for 15 years!

And so, he met with the Owner to talk about it. He ranted about the years he had put in at Unitron and about how much work he had done, more than either Rajib or Jenny. He ranted about fairness and about treating employees right.

But as worked-up as Brent was, the Owner seemed completely at peace. He listened to every anger-laced word. And then, he put his hand on Brent's shoulder, and said, “Look Brent, I'm

sorry to hear that you are hurt, but let me shoot straight with you. You should be grateful. You have never gotten a bonus this large from me before. I've always treated you right. I've always kept my word. You need to look at this from **MY** perspective, Brent. Unitron is **MY** company. And **MY** company has done exceedingly well this year. And if I want everyone to share equally in the prosperity of **MY** company, then you should be happy about **MY** generosity, not resentful and bitter."

OPEN IT / INTRODUCE IT ...

- In the story above, why was there anger instead of joy and gratitude?
- How often do you hear someone say, "That's not fair"?
- What are they usually referring to?

LOOK AT IT / STUDY IT ...

WHY WE SAY "IT'S NOT FAIR"

Matthew 20:1-12

¹ "For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard. ² He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard. ³ "About the third hour he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. ⁴ He told them, 'You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.' ⁵ So they went. "He went out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour and did the same thing. ⁶ About the eleventh hour he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, 'Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?' ⁷ "Because no one has hired us,' they answered. "He said to them, 'You also go and work in my vineyard.' ⁸ "When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.' ⁹ "The workers who were hired about the eleventh hour came and each received a denarius. ¹⁰ So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. ¹¹ When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. ¹² 'These men who were hired last worked only one hour,' they said, 'and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.'

- If you had been one of the first workers hired, how would you have reacted to the landowner? Explain.
- From a business standpoint, was the landowner too soft, unfair, or balanced in his compassion? Explain.
- When pay time came at 6 pm how would you have felt if you were in the last group hired? Why?
- The first group expected higher wages only after they heard what the last group was being paid. If they had not known they would have been happy with their own wages. What changed inside their hearts?

WHY GOD SAYS “IT’S NOT FAIR”

Matthew 20:13-16

¹³ “But he answered one of them, ‘Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius?’ ¹⁴ Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. ¹⁵ Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?’ ¹⁶ “So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

- If the landowner represents God, what does His answer mean?
- Why is it dangerous for us to compare our situation to that of someone else?
- If God was really “fair” and gave everyone just what they deserved, how would you describe the outcome?
- Why did the Twelve need to hear this story?

USE IT / APPLY IT ...

- If you had lived a moral life for a long time, would it bother you to think that those who were not as moral as you received the same benefits of God’s kingdom as you? Explain.
- Should we conclude from this story that people should wait until just before they die to follow Jesus? Why or why not?
- Why do some people think of God as unfair while others think of Him as generous?
- Read slowly and aloud the following. Silently reflect on them and then provide a time to share your thoughts and reflections.

JUSTICE is getting what you deserve.

MERCY is not getting what you deserve.

GRACE is getting what you do not deserve.

- Close by thanking God for his mercy and grace.