

Compassion

SCOTT HOEZEE

Psychologists tell us that people who fit the category of being a sociopath always lack two key human traits: Empathy and compassion. Maybe once in a while, we run across someone whose compassion seems to be seriously lacking. They may not be sociopathic, but we always feel like we have been called up short when we witness a person who just cannot be much moved by the pain or the plight of others. Something seems off about that. Certainly, as Christian followers of Jesus, we are called to display the virtue of compassion; and today on *Groundwork*, we will explore exactly that. Stay tuned.

DARRELL DELANEY

Welcome to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Darrell, we are beginning here a new six-part series on what we are calling the virtues of the New Testament. Now, in the past on *Groundwork*, we did a big, nine-part series once on the fruit of the Spirit, as we find those nine fruit listed in Galatians 5; but there are other parts in the New Testament, particularly in the writings of the Apostle Paul, where Paul extols other Christ-like virtues that are not in the fruit of the Spirit list.

DARRELL DELANEY

And in this six-part series, we are going to look at some other virtues that we will cover in this order: Compassion, humility, thankfulness, generosity, truthfulness, and finally, forgiveness.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we should also note, we did a three-part series sometime back on what we call the three cardinal virtues: Faith, hope and love, right; kind of the things at the end of 1 Corinthians 13. We did a series on the unsung virtues, which are really more like giftings and callings, things like: service, mercy, hospitality; and by contrast, we did a series on the seven deadly sins, which are the opposite, of course, of Christian virtues; but in this program, we are going to take up the first of those virtues you just listed, Darrell, and that is *compassion*.

DARRELL DELANEY

I think it is important for us to have, Scott, a working definition of what a virtue is for those who may not know. I know a lot of us may know, but for those who don't know, I think that our understanding that a virtue is a high moral and character standard. It is the bar that you set your life to, that you do not allow yourself to waver from or compromise from. It is the essence of who you want to be and who you are; and so, when you do the things that are in the list, it is not that that creates the virtue, it is out of the virtue of your heart you display these categories and these character traits that Paul and many others in the scriptures have identified.

SCOTT HOEZEE

When people think about us...when people look at us...we want them to associate us with these virtues: Oh, he is so compassionate; she is so compassionate; and indeed, that is the first virtue we are talking about. We

want this to characterize who we are. We want to be known for this, right?

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We don't want to be known as: Oh, he is stingy; oh, he is so critical. No; we want to be known for good things like compassion. A rough-and-ready definition: the English word is a compound of the Latin: *cum-* with, *pat?*-to bear or to suffer. So, compassion is to suffer with—to bear with somebody; and not just to suffer with them, but the compassion also leads us to work to alleviate the suffering of the other person. We don't want to just identify with them and leave them in their suffering; if possible, we want to do something to get them out of it, to heal it, to alleviate it.

DARRELL DELANEY

And I know that I am not the only one who has felt the love and the presence of a compassionate person who actually is with you, whether they say the right word or they just sit with you or they pray for you. This person is one who actually brings restoration and healing to you in a very tangible way that both of you can feel. So, we want to be those kinds of people who express compassion in very tangible ways.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Empathy gets involved here, too. Now, the New Testament does not really have a word, per se, for empathy, but it is linked to compassion. Empathy is your ability to put yourself in somebody else's shoes. Empathy is looking out at the world through their eyes. Imagine what they must be feeling. Empathy and compassion usually work side by side. They work in tandem. In fact, some people may be familiar with this thing called Strength Finders. It is an inventory of personal strengths. You take this long inventory, and then they've got this algorithm that spits out our top five personal strengths. Those can be things like you are an arranger, or you are a very analytical person. There are about 36 different strengths. For me, Darrell, empathy was pegged as my number one strength; and what that means for me is...I don't know how I am wired to do this...but I kind of intuit keenly how other people around me are feeling. Darrell, right now, if you got really emotional and you got on the brink of tears, I will know you are going to feel that way before you shed a tear; I just sense that is where you are going. It usually makes me tear up, too. That is what empathy is; it is a gateway to compassion.

DARRELL DELANEY

No wonder God made you a pastor, Scott. I mean, he gave you the heart to walk with people and care for them where they are; and that is the beauty of it. We actually see it in the New Testament, here in Matthew Chapter 9. It says: ³⁶When he (Jesus) saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

We see it again in Matthew Chapter 14: ¹⁴When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And in the next chapter, Chapter 15 of Matthew: ³²Jesus called his disciples to him and said, "I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry, or they may collapse on the way."

Again and again, Jesus lifts up his eyes, he sees something—a situation of need, people who are harassed and helpless and confused and hungry—and he has compassion, which leads him to want to do something. In English, Darrell, we would say when we see... "Oh, my heart goes out to him; oh, my heart went out to that guy. We locate compassion and love in our hearts. In the New Testament, the word locates it somewhere else.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes, in the guts...in the intestines. In the King James it says in the bowels.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DARRELL DELANEY

It is a very visceral place; a very, very deep and core place; and we have this saying where we say: Trust your gut; my gut told me this, my gut told me that; and it is coming from the idea of this metaphor, that the compassion comes from a very deep place.

SCOTT HOEZEE

When I was a kid, I thought...those bowels of mercy...I thought it was *bowl*s of mercy. I could never figure out what a bowl of mercy would look like; but right, we say my heart goes out to them. Jesus would say: My gut goes out to them. This is coming from my viscera...it is a visceral reaction. It is coming from the core of who you are. Compassion is at the core of who Jesus is. It is at the core of what led him to heal the sick, to feed the crowds; because compassion, Darrell, is always supposed to lead you to action.

DARRELL DELANEY

And if you notice, Jesus, in John Chapter 11, when he heard about how his friend Lazarus died, and then he is at the place where people are weeping and wailing, there is this untranslatable word in John that he convulsed; he had this feeling, this deep, visceral compassion that came from him; and we need to understand that compassion is not just something we are supposed to just sit and feel...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

It is calling us to action.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It can never be theoretical. You cannot have compassion in the abstract, in an ivory tower, and not do anything. Or sometimes compassion leads you to *not* do something. That always reminds me, Darrell, of Hosea Chapter 11, in the Old Testament. God, in that chapter, compares the Israelites to young children who God raised, and he nurtured with great love; but then the kids turn bad. The children turned away from God, and God is on the brink of punishing them. So, Hosea, a loving... brings God right up to the brink of wrath, but then God relents. We read:

⁷My people are determined to turn from me. Even though they call me God Most High, I will by no means exalt them. (And then there is this pause...) ⁸“How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I treat you like Admah? How can I make you like Zeboyim? My heart is changed within me; all my compassion is aroused. ⁹I will not carry out my fierce anger.”

So, God's compassion is linked to God's lovingkindness and his desire above all to forgive even wayward people. In just a moment, we will look at some other places in scripture, particularly in the New Testament, where compassion is addressed. So, stay tuned for that.

Segment 2

DARRELL DELANEY

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Darrell, let's dig right back into scripture, and consider these words from the Apostle Paul in Colossians 3.

DARRELL DELANEY

It says: ¹²Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion (there is that word again), kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. ¹³Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. ¹⁴And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And obviously, this is a key passage, Darrell, for this whole six-part series that we are going to do on *Groundwork*. Many of the virtues we are going to talk about in this series are in those verses that we just read from Colossians 3:12-14; but what is an interesting idea is the clothing metaphor...the clothing image. We are supposed to slip on a virtue like compassion the way we would pull a wool sweater over our heads. We wear it...we display it. In fact, my friend Neal Plantinga has said that what we get here in Colossians 3 is the Wardrobe of Christ.

DARRELL DELANEY

I think it is important to think about the fact that it says: *You* put on... *You* clothe yourselves. I cannot clothe you, Scott; you cannot clothe me. We are supposed to clothe ourselves. So, that means we have a personal responsibility to take on these attributes that God has put in us by his Spirit, and the whole clothing metaphor just makes it even more picturesque and illustrated.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; clothing...it is a big deal, Darrell. In 2022...the year 2022...the global fashion industry generated 1.7 trillion dollars in revenue. In the United States alone...it is a 345-billion-dollar industry in the US on an annual basis. Worldwide, 430 million people work in some aspect of the clothing, fashion, or textile industries. It is a big deal! And you know, people who are at the pinnacle of clothing design...we know their names: Gucci, Prada, Vuitton, Chanel, Armani. This whole business of what we put on our backs is a big deal, you know. Sometimes we have noted this before. We are willing to make ourselves walking billboard advertisements. We wear a shirt that says: Tommy Hilfiger, you know; it is like: Oh, great; I am like a walking advertisement. But we also know that, you know, sometimes we do send messages, Darrell. We put on tee shirts that send political messages or other messages, or we wear the jersey of our favorite pro football or basketball team, and that sends a signal to the world: This is who I am rooting for, right? This is who I am rooting for in the World Series; this is who I am rooting for in the Super Bowl or NCAA finals. Our clothing can send a message.

DARRELL DELANEY

When we wear clothes, some of us may or may not know the subliminal things that happen when we wear clothes. We identify with the designer or with the athlete or with the person or with the statement. We have made some sort of connection to that, or else we wouldn't wear it. So, I think Paul is making the illustration that you are supposed to identify with Christ, and this is what you wear when you identify with him; because he knows that when we wear clothes, we identify with who designed it, and the message behind it, and all the values that come just the clothes. It is not just ever clothes. So, we need to understand that. Paul is using that metaphor in the Spirit.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Every once in a while, I have had it before, maybe you have, too, Darrell, that somebody will come up to me and just start talking to me about something, and it is like: What? Why are you talking about this? Then I will remember what tee shirt I put on that morning. It is like: Oh, what he is talking about is on my tee shirt. I forgot I was wearing that. People see what you wear. Paul wants people to see what we wear. Paul wants us

to put on Christ. That has to send a message, too. We want our compassion...in this case, that we are thinking about in this episode...we want that to proclaim to people who we are or who we want to be, you know. So, Paul says when you go out into society, you go out into culture, you want to send the message that we are compassionate as Christ Jesus our Lord was compassionate. We are loving. We are people who care. We are people who want to be about the business of alleviating suffering, of feeding the hungry children, of advocating for the end of wars that take the lives of the innocent. We want to show the world this is who we are, and who we aspire to be.

DARRELL DELANEY

Let's not be like what the people talk about in the book of James, where he says: Hey, go away and be fed; but actually put some word behind that and actually demonstrate the character of Christ by doing something that your hand finds to do. So, if we can show compassion in tangible ways, that means that the heart of God is in us and we cannot ignore people's pain; we cannot ignore people's frustrations or their setbacks if we can do something about them.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; I mean, you can steel yourself, you know; you can turn the proverbial blind eye; but that would block compassion—that is a compassion blocker. Now, we have to admit sometimes when we enter other people's pain through our empathy and our compassion, sometimes you hit a wall, Darrell. I mean, sometimes life is so complex; people get themselves into such terrible messes; you can enter their pain, but you honestly don't know what to do. I don't know what to do here. Compassion means I am supposed to help, but sometimes I don't know what to do; and Darrell, what that also means about compassion is, it characterizes something else that was true of Jesus: When you are compassionate, you are going to feel pain—you are going to suffer pain.

Darrell Delaney;

So, compassion...you define it as suffering with someone...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

And so, God knows that when he enters into a relationship with us, that he is entering into a suffering relationship. It is ultimately going to cost him his life, because he loves us and he has also called us to love one another in that sacrificial way. So, it might take me out of our way; it might take me off my schedule today; it might be an "inconvenience" to me, but if I am displaying the love of Christ, I am sacrificing that because you need help right now; and I would love to have someone help me in that situation as well, when I am needing help, so I know that I am called to be the one who lives in that way.

SCOTT HOEZEE

A friend of mine has a very tender heart...very compassionate person; and he always chokes up in sorrow. He starts to cry whenever he hears a sad story about an animal suffering, or getting killed, or some other tragic situation. He will just get very emotional. He often says: Oh, I wish I weren't like this. And I am glad he is, because again, like I just said, the alternative would be shutting your eyes to the pain around us; shrugging off what is tragic; chalking up somebody's difficulties: Well, that is not my problem. You know, every once in a while, Darrell, you run across someone like that, and what do we often say? How can you be so cold? You know, I mean, it is a question and an exclamation at the same time: How can you be so cold?! How can you be somebody who just doesn't care?

You mentioned James. Let's just read it really quick:

2:15 Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. ¹⁶If one of you says to them, "Go in peace, keep warm and be well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? (James writes). Well, what good, indeed?!

DARRELL DELANEY

Well, compassion is going to lead us to move into the places where people have needs, and it will help us to be decentering of ourselves...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, right.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, it is not about me and my problem and looking out for number one; it is actually being able to see outside and love the other, whoever the other may be.

SCOTT HOEZEE

In just a few moments, though, as we close out this program, we will ponder a few final implications of exercising putting on this virtue of compassion. So, stay tuned.

Segment 3

DARRELL DELANEY

I am Darrell Delaney, with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*; and we are going to kick off this final part of this program on the virtue of compassion with Paul's opening words in 2 Corinthians 1, which says: ³Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, ⁴who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.

That phrase, *Father of compassion*, sticks out to me, Scott.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Very nice; and again, it makes compassion a core trait of Almighty God himself; and then, as you just read, Darrell, notice immediately what that leads Paul to say next: This is also why he is the God of all comfort. He comforts us in our troubles. Compassion...and you mentioned this in passing in the previous segment, Darrell...compassion definitely has that key dimension of providing comfort.

DARRELL DELANEY

And so, what we see in the scripture right here is that the God of all comfort *is* the Father of compassion...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

He is the one we actually learn our model from. So, he is showing us the compassion and demonstrating it in our own lives; and so, based on those notes, if you will, we get to go into other people's lives and just basically do what the Father has been doing in our lives, which is be there, be present, and encourage and bring comfort when we need it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we said earlier that every once in a while, if you are a compassionate, empathetic person, you will find yourself identifying with people, and moving into situations of people whose situations are so complex, you don't know where to begin. Maybe you cannot solve it. You know, you look at people living in terrible warzones, and as we record this now, there are terrible wars going on in Ukraine; in the Middle East; children are dying; people are suffering. Or some of us know people who have struggled mightily with addiction, or they have been in terrible situations of abuse; and you know, you don't know what to do. So, you just said maybe I cannot fix it, but I can at least comfort.

DARRELL DELANEY

I know in the situation where my mom was battling depression, you cannot just say a word to cheer her up.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

You cannot make everybody feel better in that situation. You basically just sit with them, and you know, if they want to get up, you help them get up; if you want them to get clothed and get dressed, you help them get dressed; you give them something to eat; and the ministry of presence is what is happening, and so, being able to sit with that person and not try to fix it. Sometimes, I don't know what to say...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

But that is fine, because I am not called to say anything at that moment; I am called to be with her.

SCOTT HOEZEE

On *Groundwork*, we did a series on the book of Job a while back; and you know, we noticed when Job's friends come to him in his utter desolation, for the first week, they just sit with him. They don't say a thing. They are at the height of their usefulness at that point, because once they start to talk, they just go off the rails pretty quickly; but for that week, they just sit in solidarity with Job; and that is what we can do. Maybe we cannot always fix it, much though our compassion and empathy make us want to be able to fix it, but we can at least let the other person know they are not alone, right? Ninety percent of life is just showing up, somebody once said; and as you just said, Darrell, it is the ministry of presence. This is compassion, too; and as we saw in that 2 Corinthians 1 verse, that is what also is the link between God being the Father of compassion, and the God of all comfort.

DARRELL DELANEY

I work in the jail as a chaplain. I think the essence of chaplaincy work is sitting with people. Sometimes they are in hospice and they are dying and they are going on to be with the Lord; and you are not there to fix it...you are not there to solve it...but you are there to be with them; as a representative of the presence of Christ, you are there. So, I see it in the jail, in the inmates, and am able to sit with them and allow God to...allow his presence to come through me there. Sometimes, God's presence comes to me through them; and it is really powerful to see as you sit together in the word and in the name of the Lord.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I have had that, too, in connection to our Calvin prison initiative. When I go to the prison where we work and where we hold our college classes, or university classes, so often the guys...the inmates...say: It is just so nice you showed up. It is just so nice to have you here, right? I mean, you know, Jesus says: I was a prisoner and you visited me. Just being there, you know. It doesn't get them out of prison; it cannot undo the bad thing they did that put them into prison, but just being there means so much to them.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But we don't want to get ahead of ourselves in this series. Our final program is going to be on the virtue of forgiveness, but I think, Darrell, in this program on compassion, we would be remiss if we didn't notice the snug connection in the Bible between compassion and the practice of forgiveness, and that always leads me to recognize the fact that compassion is the real kicker in one of the most famous of all parables, the Parable

of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15.

DARRELL DELANEY

I mean, you know, just a quick rundown of that story: There is this young son...the younger son...there are two sons. The younger son says: Hey, get Dad. Give me my inheritance now; and he is basically saying: You are dead to me; I would like you to give me my inheritance. The father doesn't argue with him; he gives him the inheritance. He runs off to a distant country and wild living. He then comes to his senses and realizes he has sinned against his father and sinned against God. He wants to go back home, and the compassion that his father shows him when he returns, and the forgiveness that he shows him is the essence of what I think you are talking about, Scott.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And it is a big deal. I mean, scholars tell us that in the ancient Near East, for a son to go up to his father and say: Drop dead...you know, legally...drop dead legally. Put your last will and testament into effect while you are still alive and give me my money. Nobody would do that. What he did was genuinely, genuinely terrible; but he finally decides he is going to go home. He is not even going to ask to be restored as a son. What he did was too terrible. It will be fine if he is a servant; fine if he is a slave. He has this well-rehearsed little speech that he runs over and over and over in his head: Father, forgive me; I have sinned against heaven and against you...blah, blah, blah. He never gets to say it because here is what we read in Luke 15:

²⁰So he (the son) got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

So, Darrell, how important is this virtue of compassion we have been thinking about? Well, it is this important: The whole Bible makes clear...Old Testament and New...we are saved by the compassion of God. If we have experienced salvation by grace alone, it is because God saw us when we were a long way off in our sin and misery, but his compassion was stirred, and he forgave us.

DARRELL DELANEY

Oh, man; you preach it, Scott; I love it, man. I think that the atonement of Christ...the Bible specifically says that at the cross judgment and compassion kiss. That is exactly where the good news is displayed to us, and God shows compassion on his children in that moment, and we literally see God's love poured out.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Again, we said just a little bit ago from that passage in 2 Corinthians 1, God is the God of compassion...the Father of compassion...but he is also the God of all comfort; and what that implies, Paul says, is that because we have received the comfort of God, we are equipped to comfort also the people around us in life. We are...as we said, we are called to put on compassion like a garment. We display it to the world. This is who we are; this is what we want to be known for; we are compassionate people; and we are because Christ Jesus is the perfect role model to do that; and for that, we give God our thanksgiving.

DARRELL DELANEY

Well, thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Darrell Delaney and Scott Hoezee, and we hope you will join us again next time as we learn about the Christ-like virtue of humility.

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SCOTT HOEZEE

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