

Discipleship During Life's Tragedies

DARRELL DELANEY

Have you ever felt stuck in your walk with Jesus? Ever feel like your prayers are bouncing off the ceiling and coming back to you? Have you ever felt distant from the Lord? In this episode of *Groundwork*, we are going to talk about that part of your walk with Jesus where things are not so easy, and possibly how God might be inviting you into a deeper and more intimate walk with him. Stay tuned.

SCOTT HOEZEE

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

DARRELL DELANEY

And I am Darrell Delaney, and this is the fourth episode, Scott, in the growth series on discipleship that we have been doing. We have been considering what it is to drink spiritual milk when we are in the infancy stage of our walk with Jesus. In the second program, we talked about the need to mature—to move from milk to meat, spiritually speaking—and what that means in our daily lives; and then, in the third program, we considered that our life with Jesus is not a linear one. It has set ups, setbacks, it has mountains and valleys, and it is kind of a zigzag. In this episode we want to talk about what can happen to our faith when we have tragedies or life-shattering experiences: Where is God in all of this? How does one's relationship with the Lord change during these times?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; so, in the previous program, we thought more about the mistakes we make, right? Bad habits we fall into, or we talked about being spiritual chameleons, you know, where we...sometimes we fall into the wrong crowd and we act like them instead of like Jesus; you know, we are hypocrites; but this time, we want to talk more about things that are beyond our control—things we don't do to ourselves, but that come our way: tragedies, cataclysms, major personal losses. Somebody once said, you know, when you are walking with Jesus you either are just coming out of a storm, you are in the storm, or you are headed toward the next storm, and I think a lot of us know that that is true.

DARRELL DELANEY

Definitely; and so, when you are walking with Jesus, if you walk with him long enough, then life circumstances are going to hit you: a tragedy or something that is going to change your life; and it surprises us and hits us, and sometimes we may have a visceral response to that. I remember one time when I was working as a meat cutter in a deli, and the manager was working in there and he was pretty stressed that day, and we were really busy. A lady came in and she said: I had an order of pork tenderloins, and I went to go check for her and I didn't see it. I asked my manager, and he came out in front of everyone, and it was embarrassing to me because he was confronting me, and he said: These are the pork tenderloins. Did you not see them? And he walked out; and so, in the middle of the moment, I just apologized to the lady and kept it moving, but when I debriefed in how I felt, I said, wait, that hurt. Then I had some anger, I had some shame. I didn't even know that was in there because I was so busy moving and moving forward; and I don't know about you, but I have had situations where I just kept going and kept pushing, but didn't realize that I had been affected by that moment. Has that happened to you?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Oh, yeah; I mean, you know, things just sort of blindside you, right? You don't see it coming; and all of a sudden, something hurts or something just gets under your skin or it bothers you; and sometimes those are somewhat minor things that, you know, you take a few deep breaths, swallow hard and you can move on; but there are other things that aren't so easy to recover from. You know, I think when...we have been talking about the stages of discipleship, and maybe when we are first disciples, we sort of think, well, just quote scripture, just be happy, think positive thoughts...

DARRELL DELANEY

Have faith.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, repeat John 3:16 to yourself and all will be well, but it doesn't always work that way.

DARRELL DELANEY

Unfortunately, when you go through situations that require a deeper answer and investigation into those things, sometimes the religious circles that we are in only have these pat answers...only have these pious sayings that might have been pithy, but they haven't been helpful; and so, it can actually lead to more frustration and more pain, because it doesn't get to underneath the reasons why things are happening; and I think when you have trauma, when you have tragedy, God is inviting a deeper relationship with him, and that is the invitation that we are calling people to today.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; tough things require tough engagement and endurance. You know, I was thinking when you were talking just now, Darrell, about pat answers and stuff, I think sometimes of the really bad things people sometimes say in funeral homes.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

You know: She's in a better place, or God needed another angel, or you know, they are trying to just sort of put a yellow, smiley-face sticker over a raw wound in someone's life, and it just doesn't work.

DARRELL DELANEY

I think it would short-circuit the grief process in that situation, and grief is actually factored into the healthy walk with Jesus. This is another part of what happens when trauma happens, when tragedy strikes. Like, for example, if you lose a loved one, you have some trauma to go through because you miss that person. There is a loss in your life, and you need a way to process that healthily with Jesus; and so, because that situation is beyond your control, we actually do have a person in the Bible who has gone through these things that were beyond his control, and his name is Job; and coming up, we want to talk about how Job's life can actually teach us something about what happens in situations that are beyond our control.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, exactly; we did a series on Job and on suffering on *Groundwork*; so, if you wanted to, as a listener, delve more into Job than we are going to do just on this program, you can look up that series on the *Groundwork* website, groundworkonline.com; but, most of the book of Job is filled with pat answers, right? I mean, we are going to get to the specifics of Job's loss, but the vast majority of the book of Job are those three friends, and then a fourth one shows up near the end, and they are the masters of the pat answers...they want to explain everything away to Job...and it doesn't work.

DARRELL DELANEY

You know, it was really great when they came in...the three friends...because they sat with him, and they didn't speak until he spoke; that is awesome; but then they began to open their mouths and undo everything by the pat answers and the traditional things. So, there is principle in the Old Testament that is called divine retribution, and so, you do right, you get blessed, you do wrong, you get cursed. If you stay on this side, you will be okay, but if you are on that side, obviously something went wrong; but Job's book shows us not necessarily is that the case every single time; and then when we have people who suffer, and we have people who go through life tragedies...let's just say like, I know some people who have recovered from drug addictions. Some of that is partly what they chose and some of it is partly circumstances that are surrounding that, and unless you are in that moment, you cannot know exactly what did that; but God is the one who understands the tragedy and the struggle that goes with the addiction, and recovery, and things like that. It is just a traumatic situation where we need to look closer at what God is up to and how we process that pain and that challenge.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; I like what you said. Job's friends were at their most useful when they didn't talk. They sat with him for a week, and that was really great, but then they started to talk. That doesn't cut it; that doesn't help us grow as disciples when people explain away our pain; but we are going to look at Job next, and get into some of the specifics, and sort of wonder, you know, when we are...you know, all of us sometimes know people who say: Man, that person has the life of Job; but it happens to all of us. Some people seem to suffer an unusual amount, but we all suffer eventually, and then the question is, how do we respond? We are going to think about that in just a moment.

Segment 2

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 we are talking about discipleship and how it is not always cut and dried all the time. It is not an easy road; and so, the question becomes: What happens to our discipleship, or what can happen...what should happen...when the bottom falls out of life?

DARRELL DELANEY

And so, to talk about that, we are going to dig into the life of Job, and the situations and circumstances in which Job finds himself. Like I said earlier, it is not about, oh, you did right, you're blessed; if you did wrong, you are cursed. There are a whole lot of things happening to Job. He loses his possessions, he loses his children, he even loses his physical health at one point, but one thing he doesn't lose is his faith.

SCOTT HOEZEE

He doesn't lose his faith and he doesn't lose his kind of plucky conviction that he didn't deserve this. The friends all tell him: Hey, what'd you do, right? I mean, as you said earlier, this is divine retribution. It is simple: You do right, God blesses you; you do wrong, God curses you and punishes you; so, what'd you do? Job says: I did nothing. I am not perfect, but I didn't do anything to deserve this. I mean, talk about a bad day, right? You lose your possessions, your children, and then later your health. You could lose your mind after all of this happens, right? I mean, this guy has been laid low.

DARRELL DELANEY

It's really painful to look through; but then, let's look at this verse in Job 1, and then we can talk about how he responded in that situation: ¹³One day when Job's sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother's house, ¹⁴a messenger came to Job and said, "The oxen were plowing and the donkeys were grazing nearby, ¹⁵and the Sabeans attacked and made off with them. They put the servants to the sword,

and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!”¹⁶While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, “The fire of God fell from the heavens and burned up the sheep and servants, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!”¹⁷While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, “The Chaldeans formed three raiding parties and swept down on your camels and made off with them. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!”¹⁸While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, “Your sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother’s house,¹⁹when suddenly a mighty wind swept in from the desert and struck the four corners of the house. It collapsed on them and they are dead, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!”

SCOTT HOEZEE

²⁰At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground [in worship]²¹and said, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I will depart.” The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised.”²²In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.

DARRELL DELANEY

Oh, my goodness...

SCOTT HOEZEE

This is a bad day!

DARRELL DELANEY

What a day! All of this happened in the same day. So, I think one of the things that pokes out to me...that sticks out to me when I read this verse is that tragedy...it comes for anyone. There is no respecter of persons. No one has cornered the market on hardships. These things happen to everybody.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; if you live long enough, you are going to get hurt. Hopefully not this catastrophically hurt, but again...you know, we are pastors, Darrell, we have walked with people who have kind of had a day like this, in a way, right?

DARRELL DELANEY

That is when they call.

SCOTT HOEZEE

People whose whole family got killed in a car accident and he alone survived, like these servants. You don’t even know what to say, even as a pastor. I mean, it is best not to say anything, probably, initially, but... So, we have walked with people who have experienced exactly this. Their whole family was wiped out in one bad highway accident, and now what happens to your faith? Job here responds, amazingly enough, with kind of worship of God almost, right?

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes, he does; he responds with worship, but before he responds with worship, he does something interesting. He tears his robe and he shaves his head. Now, in the cultural responses of how this works in his culture, everyone knows that that is grief. If they walked past and they saw that he ripped his clothes and shaved his head, they would say: Oh, he is grieving; he just went through something deep; and the point that I am making is that grieving should be a natural process to trauma, to loss... You are not strange if you are grieving at this moment; and I hate the fact that sometimes we want to rush past that.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; he doesn’t shave his head and tear his robes *after* he says: Blessed be the name of the Lord, but before he says it...

DARRELL DELANEY

Exactly.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is a good point; you are right. Let's not rush to the worship part. That is exactly right; and you know, in our day, we don't show grief in exactly that same way. There are different ways to show that we are grieving. Some people wear all black for a while or they put black armbands on. Sometimes you see that in Major League Baseball, that they will wear something because a teammate died; or police will put a black rubber band like around their badges if a fellow cop got killed. You know, we have different ways of showing our grief outwardly, but inwardly we certainly know it is not wrong to grieve these circumstances. Particularly, I think, in certain Reformed, and particularly in certain Calvinist circles, we tend to say: Look, it must have been God's will, so suck it up...

DARRELL DELANEY

Sure.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Just bless the name of the Lord; don't lament; don't cry out to God; don't, you know, shake your fist at God because you don't understand. No, no, no, no, no! Just accept it. That is not healthy, even; it is not human.

DARRELL DELANEY

It does not actually bode well for us to ignore pain, or try to be tough and stoic and process the way through the pain without feeling. That is not actually healthy; and we need to find healthy ways to express our raw emotion and our anger, our pain...because our God is big enough...read the psalms. David is all over the place with his emotions, and he is vocal about it; and we need to find ways to do that that doesn't bring harm to self or others.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that is, I think, an important point...the psalms of lament that you just mentioned, Darrell...because we are talking about discipleship here, and we are talking about events that could shipwreck our faith and end our growth of discipleship permanently, right?

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Sometimes, regrettably, that happens. There are some people who just never recover at all. They never pray again. They never believe in God again. They just walk away from the whole thing. But if we are going to continue as disciples...if we want to grow as disciples...it has to be through these experiences; and one of the ways that that happens is by complaining, right?

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I mean, don't stop talking to God, but tell God what you think. Better that than never talk to God again. You are still on the road of discipleship if you can complain...if you can lament. I think that is a really important point.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, we have the reaction that happens with his visceral response and his grieving; but we also have the response, and that response is worship, just like you mentioned earlier...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

He says: Naked I came into this world, and naked I shall leave; blessed be the name of the Lord; and it is really important for us to know that there are mountain-high times, where we are really excited and things are happening; but something happens when you worship God in the valley-low times; when the answer hasn't come, when you are still in the pain; like there is an intimate place that God can meet you there when you are in that situation.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; and again, better to respond *to* God with what you are feeling than just walk away from God for good. It may seem weird to us that Job manages to bless the name of the Lord despite having the worst day in the history of humanity, but he did grieve first and then he worshipped, and he is going to spend the rest of the book basically defending his own reputation and saying: I don't think God did this to me as a punishment. I think that is part of the growth of discipleship, too.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes, Scott; and I think that every one of us has had a moment where we are like, I didn't sign up for this; and so, to be able to talk to God about how we feel there, and what we want to help us understand, too, is that we are going to get to some practical applications on how God can meet us right there in the midst of our trials when we come up next. So, stay tuned.

Segment 3

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, with Darrell Delaney, and you are listening to *Groundwork*; and in this program, Darrell, we have been thinking about the outright tragedies that can come that at least shake our faith, and at worst, can sometimes cause people to lose their faith and just stop wanting to be a disciple of Jesus at all; and we are trying to talk about, in the context of Job, what it means to somehow be able to go on and continue on the path of discipleship even when something happens that has, for at least a moment, knocked us clean off the path.

DARRELL DELANEY

And I think the people who are walking with Jesus already understand this, that life isn't always easy; it isn't always sunshine and rainbows; there are going to be challenges; there are going to be tragedies; and there are life problems that happen to us, but we have a God who is engaged with us, intimately connected with us, and loves us who wants to help us through these situations.

So, the first thing is that God cares about how we feel. We've got a scripture on that in Psalm 56, where it says that: (verse 8 paraphrased) You track all of our sorrows and collect our tears in a bottle—and everything that you record in your book. So, God is paying attention to the tears that we cry. We often say in pastoral care that your tears have a language, and even though you are not vocally speaking them, they are telling us something, and God understands that language.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; and that is why, actually, even though...I love that image, that he collects your tears as in a bottle...I mean, that is just so beautiful. It has always struck me as being so poignant; but that also means, Darrell, that even in worship we need to let people know it is okay to have tears.

Years ago, Nicholas Wolterstorff wrote a very seminal article on worship called: *Trumpets, Ashes, and Tears*; and he pointed out in that article that any given Sunday, there are some people who have come into worship blowing the trumpets of praise, there are some people who have come into worship bearing the ashes of repentance on their hearts because they are really guilt-ridden about something they did, and there are some people who come into worship with tears flowing, if not on their faces, then in their hearts; but that is okay. Tears have a place in worship, too...the *tearful*—the weeping—have a place in worship, too. You don't have

to come to church only when you are just happy with Jesus. You can come into church when you are broken, and God collects those tears as in a bottle. This, too, is a part of discipleship; and better to come to church in tears...and even in lament...than to stop coming to church at all because you figure if God let this happen to me, he cannot be real.

DARRELL DELANEY

I have seen this pattern in youth ministry, and it isn't just relegated to youth, but when people go through tragedies, you hardly see them at church. When things are awesome, then you see more attendance, and then you see a trend when you say: Okay, they must be going through something. I've got to go as a shepherd and find out what is going on there. So, not only do we see in scripture that God cares about the tears that we cry, we also see that he cares about all the things that we go through, and there is a passage here in 1 Peter 5:7 that says: [Amplified Bible]

Casting all your cares (your anxieties, your worries, and all your concerns) on him, for he cares about you with deepest affection and watches over you very carefully.

I love the fact that he is able to address all the things that make us anxious, all the things that I think are situations for me that are serious—that he cares about all the things I care about.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; so, better to run *to* God with our problems, and in the midst of our pain, even if we have an edge of anger and disappointment, than run away from God; and I think that is absolutely true. When you mentioned a moment ago, Darrell, about, you know, people with problems not coming to church, somewhere I read one time where somebody said: You know, the church isn't supposed to be some country club where you show up when everything is grand and you've got money in the bank...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

The church is a hospital, and nobody, in their right mind anyway, would say: Ooh, as soon as this little heart attack eases up, then I am going to check into the hospital. As soon as the heart attack is done, I am going to go to the hospital. No! You go to the hospital *when* you're having a heart attack. You come to church, not when you are well, but when you are ill—when you are in trouble. That is exactly when you *most* need to come to church. Some people who say: Once I get my act together, then I will start coming to church, it is like, you are supposed to come to church to help you get your act together, by God's Spirit.

DARRELL DELANEY

Exactly; and I think that when you come to church with that mentality that I am getting the help that I need, then you realize the discipleship doesn't happen because you are all by yourself, it happens because you are in the context of a community of people who are walking with you who are intentional about sharing with God where they really are. So, at our church, we would have a time of confession, we would have a time of lamenting, we would have a time where everyone gets together and prays for one another's concerns; and when you come to church, and you share those things with those people, then you realize that you have a connection. Because of life circumstances, we have all been through something, haven't we, Scott?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Oh, exactly; and we need that community, Darrell; what you just said is so, so important. My friend Tom Long, who was a preacher and teacher of preaching told the story in a sermon one time of a pastor who, on Easter...on Holy Saturday, the day between Good Friday and Easter...this pastor's wife became suddenly ill in the morning, she got worse by noon, and by evening she was dead. So, he lost his wife. Obviously, he couldn't preach the next day...somebody filled in for him...but he still went to church; but he said later: I couldn't believe in the resurrection that day, so the community believed for me...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Until I could get back to the point of believing in it myself, because I was... That is exactly it. We need that community—the communion of saints—to hold us up and to keep us on the path of discipleship, even to carry us, if need be, for a time.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; and I think it is important for us to understand that even though we have these trials, we have people who can help us in our walk with God in those times.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; we are not Lone Rangers, right? We are not supposed to be just me and Jesus. We need everybody around us; and we have to accept, too, one final point, since we have been talking about Job. Accept that we are going to have scars after these experiences. We are not just going to go on like we did. Even at the end of Job, God restores his fortunes. We read in Job 42:

¹⁰b that he gave him twice as much as he had had before. (And then it says) ¹¹All his brothers and sisters came to him (to his house). They comforted and consoled him over all the trouble the Lord had brought on him...

So, there is still...even after the sorrow sometimes, Darrell...there is that need for the community to continue to comfort us and to deal with us with the scars we bear.

DARRELL DELANEY

You know what is encouraging to me about that, Scott, is the fact that when we go through life's circumstances, we get wounds, we get hurt, we get these scars, and we serve a savior who has wounds and scars, and he welcomes us to walk with him, and he brings us into the situation where he can encourage us, no matter what the circumstances.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Thanks be to God.

DARRELL DELANEY

Well, thank you for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We hope you will join us again next time as we continue to dig deeply into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. Connect with us at groundworkonline.com to share what *Groundwork* means to you, or tell us what you would like to hear discussed next on *Groundwork*.

SCOTT HOEZEE

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