

Grow as a Disciple of Jesus Christ

SCOTT HOEZEE

Without meaning to, sometimes parents exploit the age of a child to make a point. So, maybe one day your daughter tries to use the blender in the kitchen, even though she has been told not to; and we exclaim: Susie! What were you thinking? You are only 7 years old. The very next day, though, when the child refuses to do something we want her to do, we may say: Susie; you are almost 8 years old now, so you can do that. You are only 7; you are almost 8! Parents go both ways sometimes, but one thing we know for sure; we expect our children to grow up...to mature. The gospel expects the same for disciples, and today on *Groundwork*, we will explore growth in discipleship. 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 this is now the second program of a series of programs on discipleship. In the first program, we thought about the early stages of discipleship, and what the New Testament calls the craving for spiritual milk. What is spiritual milk? We talked about how do we get the basics of the gospel—the basics of who Jesus is—deep into us like a child growing through milk before we can move on to the meat of the gospel, and that is what we are going to talk about here.

DARRELL DELANEY

I think it is important for us to understand that the milk of the gospel is never going to get old. Even though it won't be our primary source of nourishment, we are still people who are going to need spiritual milk throughout our lives; but at some point in our walk, God is going to call us to something higher, to something more solid, if you will. So, we need to focus on that.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; I mean, most people, if they are not lactose intolerant to something, continue to need milk in their lives. You need calcium to keep your bones strong, and if you cannot do it through milk, you have to take calcium tablets or something. So, right...you are right. It is not like once you grow up as a child you never drink milk ever again. Schools have provided milk for children for decades and centuries maybe even, because milk is important for children; but, when we are a parent, as soon as we are able, we do start to nudge children toward more solid food.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

You know, maybe it is Gerber baby food at first...all those mushed up carrots and beans...

DARRELL DELANEY

Corn...

SCOTT HOEZEE

But...yes, that is right. We move our children on. God moves us on; but I think before we talk more about growth in discipleship and moving from milk to meat, I think we ought to make clear, Darrell, what we are *not* talking about here. What we are not talking about is a hierarchy, right, or stratifying people?

DARRELL DELANEY

That is true. So, I don't want people to think this...and I am glad you are going here, Scott...I don't want people to think: Okay, if I check all the boxes, if I get all the good grades, if you will, then I am a super Christian; and if you don't get as good grades, and if you don't check all your boxes, then I don't know what to tell you. Maybe you need a little bit more help. Maybe I could come counsel you in my puffed-up pride, and my own legalism. I don't want that to be the focus. Actually, we need to understand it is grace alone, and God's finished work is the reason why we are even here; and out of gratitude for what God has done, we get to serve him, but it is not a meritocracy or some sort of I earned my own way. This isn't what we want to communicate today.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and Paul was all over this...Paul in particular...other New Testament writers, too, were all over this. Yes, we don't want to say: Well, when you really grow in discipleship, you are a super Christian and the rest of you are kind of slouch Christians. You know, some people get straight As with God and some people get Cs and Ds, you know. Those people who get straight As, they are going to get a big old mansion in glory someday, and the slouch Christians, maybe an apartment or something...an efficiency apartment. That is not what we are talking about. When we talk about growth, growth is expected. We should grow...we should want to grow...but it would be a sign, not of maturity but of immaturity...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

If we used our growth as a way to look down our noses at other people. That is the opposite of the gospel.

DARRELL DELANEY

Exactly; and I believe that we need to understand we will become more and more dependent even as we walk with Christ more, and I am sure you will talk more about that later; but I want to talk about the Apostle Paul and the scripture that he gave us concerning what the growth and the expectation of discipleship is; and it reads in Ephesians 4:7-15:

But to each one of us, grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. ⁸This is way it says: "When he ascended on high, he took many captives and gave gifts to his people." ¹¹So, Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, ¹²to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

SCOTT HOEZEE

¹⁴Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. ¹⁵Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. There is a lot in that passage, Darrell, but here Paul is tying our growing and our maturing and our receiving gifts to the ascension of Jesus.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, we see that as Christ is ascending, he gives us the help we need when he gives the gifts that we need. So, he did tell us when he was ascending that it would be better for me that I [Jesus] go, because when I go I can give you the comfort, I can give you the gifts, I can give you the power from on high; and so, these gifts...the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, are designed to help the body of Christ

facilitate that growth process that is healthy. So, it goes back to what we were saying earlier, that we need to continue to expect growth in our spirits, and not just stay infants our whole life.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And you know, when Jesus first told the disciples: It's for your own...this is in John in some of those upper room discourses...it is for your own good that I am going to go away. I don't think they bought it. They said: No, no, no, no, no; we want to keep you here. How can it be good for you to go away? But it is, because one of the traditional teachings of the Church in terms of the meaning of the ascension is that, indeed, from that position at the right hand of the Father, he showers us with gifts; and those gifts are meant to make us mature, help us to grow up, help us to serve different functions in the Church, and to keep the gospel ministry going, and to keep it provided for. So, it really was to their advantage that Jesus went away. Eventually, I think, the disciples turned apostles figured that out; but of course, Darrell, that also means we need to be receptive...right...to the gifts that Jesus sends.

DARRELL DELANEY

It is also important to mention that Jesus didn't waste any time making sure that they had what they needed. Forty days after the resurrection he is immediately getting the gifts that they need at Pentecost. So, this must be very important if Jesus is trying to get it to them immediately.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I like that point. It didn't take too long before the Spirit was poured out on Pentecost, and if the disciples wondered what Jesus meant when he said it would be for your good that I go away, they didn't have to wait long to see it at all.

You know, that is the great thing about the book of Acts. Things take off. We did a series on that on *Groundwork* a while back, but things take off like lightning, and the disciples...the apostles...they could hardly run fast enough to keep up with the Spirit. The Spirit is just popping up all over the place...

DARRELL DELANEY

Definitely.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And they are just, you know, huffing and puffing to keep up. That is an interesting image for us in the Church also today, I think. We just want to keep up and keep growing and keep receiving those gifts from God.

DARRELL DELANEY

The *ing* is continuing, and that is something that we need to know. The growth is *growing* and *serving* and *reforming*; and so, how that looks and what that involves in the next segment is something we want to unpack. So, stay tuned.

Segment 2

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, along with Darrell Delaney, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, and this second program in a series on discipleship: What does it mean to be a disciple, what is discipleship, and particularly in this program, what does growth in discipleship look like as we move from the milk of the gospel to solid food, or meat of the gospel. We just, Darrell, had a passage from Paul in Ephesians 4, that the ascension of Jesus is allowing him to shower gifts on the Church through the Holy Spirit, but also, one of the things that the New Testament says is that we increase our knowledge, and we increase our discernment; and that is an interesting pattern in the New Testament.

DARRELL DELANEY

I think it is important, too, to understand, Scott, that we are expected to continue to grow up into our head, who is Christ. So, we are not to remain where we are; and Paul talks about moving from the elementary

teachings of this world to the meat, if you will; and so, I would like us to unpack a little bit what that means...what it means...what is meat and what is that about?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Paul talks about that, what you were just talking about, Darrell, the elemental and elementary teachings of the world. He talks about in the letter to the Colossians...Colossians Chapter 2...and we are going to pick it up at verse 6:

So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him,⁷ rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. ⁸See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ. (Now moving on to verse 16) ¹⁶Therefore, do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink or with regard to a religious festival, a new moon celebration or a sabbath day. ¹⁷These are the shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.

DARRELL DELANEY

¹⁸Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you. Such a person also goes into great detail about what they have seen; they are puffed up with idle notions by their unspiritual mind. ¹⁹They have lost connection with the head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow. ²⁰Since you died with Christ to the elemental spiritual forces of this world, why, as though you still belonged to the world, do you submit to its rules: “Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!”? ²²These rules, which have to do with things that are all destined to perish with use, are based on merely human commands and teachings.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Okay; so again, Darrell, that is a long passage with a lot in it, but it is important to hear it, because this really is a pattern in the New Testament. Apparently, you know, if we read between the lines here it looks like that in the city of Colossae that there were a lot of odd ideas floating about, including, we gather, something involving the worship of angels; and some people supposedly receiving visions of angels. Scholars know a lot more about what all that entailed. I don't understand it all myself, but it looks like the people, including some of the Christians in the church who were being seduced by this idea, it was like: Well, if you want to be a super-duper believer, you are going to see angels. I saw angels; you didn't see angels? Aw, that is too bad, you know, I hope your faith gets better, right? So, they were taking on airs about these angel visions and other practices that they were judging people on.

DARRELL DELANEY

There seemed to be a lot of weird things floating around, like you said, Scott; and it wouldn't be very different from the weird things that are floating around today...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Um, yes.

DARRELL DELANEY

We have some things that make us really nervous about, okay, is this what it means to be really... I heard in an erroneous teaching, and it is not scripture based, but there are some who believe that if you are not speaking in tongues, then you are not a Christian. That is not scripture; that is not what scripture teaches, and there are clearly people who do not speak in tongues who have a relationship with God that is vibrant; and so, some of the teachings that go around that make spirituality a bigger thing, and say you have to have this insight and knowledge, or this secret pathway to make you a better Christian, I don't think is very helpful.

SCOTT HOEZEE

No; and sometimes it can even just be...so, he talks about rules and rituals: Do not handle, to not taste, do not touch. These are things that people were saying. It is sort of like these are areas of the gospel...these are areas of life...that don't have hard and fast rules, right? And Paul wants to make clear that some places have certain customs...some churches even today, as you said, Darrell, have certain customs...and it is like, well, if you don't do this, if you don't...if you eat that or if you ever drink alcohol or, you know, if you go to the movies...and not so long ago, that was a big deal in the Christian Reformed Church that I am part of and we are part of...

DARRELL DELANEY

But we had DVDs, though.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, we got television; but the idea was, we could judge you; and Paul says don't let cultural rules or even traditional practices get in the way of Jesus and the gospel. That is not what it is about; and it is so easy for us to get tripped up on that; and also, by the way, it is so easy, therefore, to get...a phrase you used a while back, Darrell...get puffed up by this stuff. It is like, well, I never do that, that, and that; therefore, I am a really good Christian, and that sister over there, who does this, this, and this...uh, uh, uh; and we become proud, and that is not the gospel either.

DARRELL DELANEY

That reminds me of the scripture passage where you have this person who stands in church and says: I am glad I'm not like that sinner. My merit is that I give a tithe here...a tenth of everything I get...and I do all these things; but then, there is another person who, in humility says, have mercy on me, a sinner. So, I think that the point is, if we don't rest on our own laurels or whatever spiritual practices we think are maturity, because these Christians in Colossae, they are trying to find the right way...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

But they just don't seem to be finding the right way until Paul is able to clarify how do you stay connected to the root of Christ, and that alludes to being dependent on Christ. So, we cannot go around thinking we will be *more* independent as we mature, like we are when we are growing in our natural life: I can drive the car now; I couldn't drive the car when I was 12 or when I was 3; I shouldn't drive the car when I am 12 or 3; but now that I am independent, as I grow in my life physically, that is not the same as the spiritual life, because the older you get, the more dependent you get on Christ.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Then that is the irony of the gospel, right? As you just said, Darrell, in almost any job you can think of, you start out as an apprentice, and then you are a journeyman in the trades, you know; and the goal is ever greater *independence*, right? In a *Groundwork* program a while back I noted that if you want to become a sushi chef in Japan, you will not touch a knife or a piece of fish for the entire first year of your training. You are not allowed to touch a knife or fish. You watch and you observe, then you slowly... and then when you finally make it, you are an independent chef and you are in the kitchen by yourself with your knife and your fish. The gospel is the opposite. The more mature we become in our discipleship, the more we grow, as you just said, in our dependence. We know that it is all grace; and that is why Paul wants the Colossians, and all of us, to move away from these what he calls elemental teachings of the world, which tell you there are other ways to salvation, and you can do it, and it is all about how you behave, and I will set the rules, and I will establish the rituals. Paul says: No, a mature believer knows that is not the way. Jesus is the way.

DARRELL DELANEY

And to understand that even better, the fact that Christ in John 15 says you need to be rooted and connected to the vine if you are going to bear any fruit...any fruit that doesn't bear, he is going to prune and cut off. So, the idea is to stay connected to the vine—the root—

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly.

DARRELL DELANEY

That way, you can bear fruit of what it means to grow in Christ.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is right, exactly; and we want to think a little bit about how our work for Christ ties in with discipleship and growth of discipleship. There is a passage in Hebrews that will help us do that, so we will look at that in just a moment.

Segment 3

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 now as we close out this program on discipleship and growth in discipleship, and go to Hebrews Chapter 6; and there are two things we are going to see in this passage that we need to keep in balance when talking about maturity in discipleship. So, here are the first few verses of Hebrews 6:

Therefore, let us move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ and be taken forward to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, ²instruction about cleansing rites, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. ³And God permitting, we will do so.

DARRELL DELANEY

You know what's interesting to me in this verse, Scott, is that Paul is trying to keep the main thing the main thing.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

There are so many different things that could be moving in distractions: Old wives' tales, old myths, new moons, angels, and all these other things. He says: No, no, no; we are built on Christ. He is the true head, and we are saved by grace alone. Let's just keep that the main thing, and work out the details from there.

SCOTT HOEZEE

As with Paul in Colossians 2, so here in Hebrews 6, this first part is about teaching—this first part is about what people say, practices they suggest you engage in if you want to be a really good Christian; but it is not only about what is in our head. So, let's hear from a few verses on, Darrell. Hebrews 6, starting at verse 9.

DARRELL DELANEY

Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are convinced of better things in your case—the things that have to do with salvation. ¹⁰God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them. ¹¹We want each of you to show the same diligence

to the very end, so that what you hope for may be fully realized. ¹²We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience, inherit what has been promised.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, here is the balance act that mature disciples need to do. On the one hand, we don't want to be distracted by people who hold out this ritual or activity or work as though salvation depends on you doing that...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Or even that you shore up salvation. So, you know, don't fall into these people who tell you how you have to behave. On the other hand, though, from the verses you just read, Darrell, it is not as though our work is unimportant. We are supposed to do some things. The writer to the Hebrews says God won't forget your work to help his people. So, it is both/and, isn't it?

DARRELL DELANEY

Definitely. So, it is interesting because I was thinking about this when I had a question from a person who said: I thought it was that we were saved by grace through faith, like Romans says; but then the other scripture says that faith without works is dead. So, then, what is happening there? I explained that one is before, as far as salvation. Christ's work is fully the payment for all salvation, and that means we are saved by grace; however, our works matter to God, and out of gratitude for him saving us by grace, we get to serve him; and he does care about what we do, because the Bible does say that we will know them by their fruits. So, the fact that we have work that matters...that can be efficacious...that can be done...that doesn't earn our salvation or righteousness, but it shows how a mature disciple lives. That is the fruit that you see.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; and that is the Apostle James, right? I mean, yes, you are not really saved by your works, but you are not saved without them either; but it is cart and horse, right? As you say...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And as one of my teachers always said in Paul in particular: The indicative; you are saved by grace through faith...boom. That the indicative precedes the imperative. It is after you are saved by grace fully; now, Paul says, act like it. You were buried with Christ in baptism; you arose a new person...

DARRELL DELANEY

Romans 6...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Now you behave like it. So, you know, Paul never says to do things, and the writer to the Hebrews is not saying do things so that you can be saved. It is always because you have been saved, now act like it. Do not become something different, be who you now are in Christ; and this is the balancing act we are talking about: Discipleship in this program and in this series, and maturity in discipleship; and Darrell, I think one of the marks of mature discipleship is that you keep root and fruit separate, which is not as easy as it sounds, because I think we all are wired in such a way that we tend to mix those things up, right? We tend to put more value on what we can see...our deeds...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Than in what we cannot see...God's grace.

DARRELL DELANEY

I think that we need to remember what Paul has said: Remember to keep the main thing the main thing. Christ is the head, and he is the one who has the best fruit of all. So, if I am comparing my apples to your oranges, that is not what we are supposed to do. We are supposed to look at Christ as the standard; but then we also understand that our work matters to God, so he is the one who is actually the true fruit inspector, if you will. He is the one who watches what we do; he is the one who pays attention to how I said that to that lady or how I treated this man. He is the one who knows my conduct and my heart; even if no one draws attention to it, he sees us and he knows us.

SCOTT HOEZEE

He never puts it exactly this way, Darrell, but there is a sense in which when Paul or James or anybody in the New Testament...or John, you know, in the epistles of John, saying: You cannot say you love God and hate your brother. I mean, that is just...that is impossible, right?

DARRELL DELANEY

That's right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

What they all basically say is: If you live that way, having received the grace of God, then you just don't get it. You just don't get the point. The point is, grace is supposed to overflow in you now...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

You know, it is supposed to gush out of you now. The same grace that saved you, that is why you are courteous, that is why you are kind. The fruit of the Spirit...you have goodness and gentleness and faithfulness, and all the stuff, you know, the New Testament talks about. If you don't let that shine in your life...if that fruit doesn't grow on the branches of your life, you don't get it; and James would even say: I think you didn't really get grace at all if that is how you live; and Paul would say: If you got grace, you will live this way.

DARRELL DELANEY

I think it is important for us to know that God is paying close attention. He is not just way off in space somewhere and not paying attention. He is actually looking at our lives; he is expecting us to take the spiritual milk that is nourishment and to grow up with it; and then he is expecting us to demonstrate in our lives what meat looks like; and we do that by holding onto the basics in this hand...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

And we also show someone else how to do the same. So, as a disciple, we have a task to do. We inherit it and we live it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we never need despair about our ongoing maturity because as we saw from Ephesians 4, Christ is in heaven right now, at the right hand of the Father, showering us with the gifts of the Spirit; thanks be to God.

DARRELL DELANEY

Thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Darrell Delaney with Scott Hoezee, and we hope you will join us again next time as we dig into scripture to help us better understand what to expect from our discipleship journey, and what to do when we experience setbacks or discover our own habits are hindering our discipleship growth.

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*.

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