

How to Live as Christians

SCOTT HOEZEE

Sometimes, those of us who are parents know of a certain experience you have as your children get more independent. Maybe it is the first time they go out driving the car alone; maybe it is when we drop off a child at college for the first time. As the child gets ready to go out the door, or as we prepare to leave them in their college dorm room, sometimes parents give a gush of last-minute reminders, recommendations, and pleas. It all comes out in a rush: Be careful; remember always to...; don't forget to... As the Apostle Peter wraps up his first letter, he does something like that, and today on *Groundwork*, we will explore all that. So, 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, this is the fifth program of what will be an eight-part series covering 1 Peter and 2 Peter; and this fifth program in this series is going to be the last one on 1 Peter. Our next program will delve into 2 Peter. The previous four programs covered a lot of ground, as we traced Peter's main themes of Christian identity and Christian suffering under persecution. We have seen some of Peter's vivid imagery on Christ as our living hope and as our living stone. Today, Darrell, we are going to delve into 1 Peter Chapters 4 and 5 to see how Peter concludes this really jam-packed letter.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes, Scott; and as we have been talking about, Peter is talking to the gentile Christians who are scattered all across the known world, and they are enduring a lot of persecution under Nero, the emperor of Rome; and so, he wants them to understand there is a way to live, even though you are being persecuted; and sometimes others have been killed for this faith, it is a precious thing to have, and Jesus Christ is the one who gives us hope in the midst of trials; and he wants to make sure they get the last few details in this chapter.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, let's dig into scripture, as we do here on *Groundwork*. We are going to pick it up here at 1 Peter 4:7, where Peter writes: The end of all things is near. Therefore, be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray. ⁸Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. ⁹Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. ¹⁰Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. ¹¹If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, Peter is really wrapping up here, but he wants to make sure that they remember these last few details, and he often refers back to love; he often goes back to that quality as being one of the most important things. So, we see that it sounds even worshipful here. It sounds like a doxology almost.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, it almost sounds like the letter is over right here in verse 11: Amen. Nothing comes after amen; well, no; as they say on TV commercials: But wait, there is more. There is plenty more to come here in Chapter 4, and then Chapter 5. But let's note, Darrell, that Peter says something interesting here. He says: The end of all things is near.

DARRELL DELANEY

I think that, not only does Peter pick up this theme, but you see this theme in 1 Thessalonians, where they talked about the coming of Christ being very near; and even in 1 Thessalonians you could see people actually waiting for it to happen, and he had to tell them: No, you have to get back to work, because people were literally sitting around on the roof waiting for Christ to come back; and they had to be reminded that there are things to do. So, Peter is reminding them that the Second Coming of Christ is something that needs to always be in the background.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and it is possible that the early Church thought Jesus would be back really, really soon. Two thousand years later, we know that wasn't quite the case, but even if it is delayed, you know, Peter wants us to live with a constant awareness that Jesus is always with us: and so, be alert; be sober-minded; pray. Whether or not Christ is coming back tomorrow, he is with us by his Holy Spirit right now. So, Peter says act like that, and one of the key ways you do that is you love one another; you love everybody deeply and from the heart. You know, Jesus did that, Darrell, but Peter then next says something that Jesus didn't have to have apply to him, because Peter says that that kind of love covers over a multitude of sins.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, Jesus didn't have any sins; but we do. We do have a multitude of sins, but love helps with that, Peter says.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; so, you know, I might break a promise to you. I might not be where I said I was going to me. I might not do what I said I was going to do. Then, and unfortunately, because we are not perfect, we are going to hurt each other; we are going to offend each other; so, it would be good for us to have the unconditional agapé love that the Spirit gives, because it gives us room to find mercy for one another and to find a second chance.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; and if we don't do that, if we don't find a way to love each other and so forgive each other when we hurt each other...unintentionally...even sometimes if we hurt someone intentionally because we are angry or something, if we don't do that, we cannot have community. All of those sins are just built up like clutter, and we will not be able to have community. So, love each other deeply from the heart, and when that happens, Peter says, God is praised in our church communities. But then, next, Darrell, Peter returns to one of the main themes of this letter.

DARRELL DELANEY

Picking up in verse 12, it says: Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. ¹⁵If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. ¹⁶However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, as we have noted in this series, Darrell, Peter was writing to gentile Christians scattered throughout Asia Minor, who were enduring a time of really terrifying, rugged persecution by the Roman Empire, and probably especially the Emperor Nero, who really hated Christians. Now, Peter doesn't suggest here, Darrell, that suffering itself is a good thing, but he does say that if the only reason you are getting insulted or sneered at or roughed up, or even killed...that the only reason is not because you are a criminal or you are doing bad things...but the only reason is because you bear the name of Christ. Well, then you are joining Jesus in his sufferings, and that will result in the glory to God. Not easily, right? Peter is not being trite here; but when we suffer for Christ, Darrell, he says God will be with us and will preserve us, no matter what happens.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; I could see gentile Christians in this. I could imagine that they could be thinking: Man, this is a lot; this is...people are losing their lives; people are getting hurt...they are getting fed to animals. All these things are happening. Is this really worth it to go through all of these things? Is this just happening to us, or what is going on? And Peter says: No, no, no; it is not just happening to you, it is happening to a lot of different believers, and it is worth it because, if you suffer for righteousness, it can be redemptive...it can be a witness...it can be a testimony; and therefore, do not lose heart in that situation, because other folks are watching...the world is watching how they respond to these things, and they actually can be a testimony.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; in verse 16, he says: If you suffer as a Christian; and actually, Darrell, that is only one of three times in the whole New Testament where the term *Christian* appears. The other two are in the book of Acts, including Acts 11, when we are told that it was in Antioch that for the first time the people who followed Jesus were labeled as *Christians*; and it is possible in Antioch there, Darrell, that some of the people who maybe coined that term maybe even kind of made it up as an insult, you know. Who do you people think you are? Little mini-Christ? Little Christ-ians? But Peter says, even if they meant it as an insult, wear it as a badge of holy honor. What an honor to bear the actual name of Jesus Christ.

DARRELL DELANEY

It is a beautiful thing, and it goes back to the point you just made earlier, how these things can be redemptive. They did it to insult them; they did it to belittle them; but what they didn't know is that they were complimenting them in the best way: I want to be known as a person who identifies with Christ...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

That is something that we want to be proud of.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And if that is the only reason you are suffering, Peter says, that is a good thing—a redemptive thing; and something that will result in glory to God.

But now, we are going to move next into 1 Peter 5, so stay tuned.

Segment 2

DARRELL DELANEY

I am Darrell Delaney, with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And as we said at the opening of this episode, Darrell, Peter is cramming in lots of last-minute advice and reminders as he closes out this, his first epistle. So, now let's turn to the last chapter: 1 Peter 5, and it opens this way: To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ's sufferings who also

will share in the glory to be revealed: ²Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; ³not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. ⁴And when Christ, the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, this verse is very familiar to me, Scott. Becoming ordained in the minister of the gospel in the Christian Reformed Church, they read this passage to charge us...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

To make sure that we know what we are getting ourselves into, and that we made a promise to God that we will serve as best we can; and Peter wants them to know that the theme is they are under-shepherds; they are shepherds who serve, and that is a very valid point, Scott.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Most churches in this day have elders and deacons, and those offices existed from almost the very earliest days of the Christian Church. Peter says: I am an elder, too—I am a fellow elder; but Peter does point out one thing here, Darrell, that probably no other elder in the churches to whom he is writing this letter can say. Peter says: I was a personal witness. I was there; I was a personal witness to the suffering and death of Jesus; and so, Peter is a fellow elder, but he is a fellow elder with a pretty good resumé.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; but also, he wants them to know that because he was a witness, he really knows what he is talking about, and he can give a really powerful charge.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, the people of God are, he says, Jesus' own flock, but as Jesus is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty for now, Jesus uses humans in the Church to care for the flock directly on his behalf; and what that means, Darrell, is that if you are taking care of the flock on behalf of Jesus, then you have to do it the way Jesus himself would do it; but of course, Jesus was pure and holy and perfect, but we are not; and so, Peter has to give some advice here to help them avoid...these elders in particular...avoid certain pitfalls.

DARRELL DELANEY

And he reminds them of what Jesus said, actually. Jesus is the one who talked about how we should do that, in Matthew Chapter 20, starting in verse 25, it says: Jesus called them (the disciples) together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. ²⁶Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ²⁷and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— ²⁸just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, Peter is remembering those words; again, he was an eyewitness to Jesus and so he was there the day Jesus said those words in Matthew Chapter 20; and so, now he is reminding the elders: Don't lord it over. Because that is just it, right, Darrell? Any time we get a position of any kind of influence or privilege or power, since we are fallible human beings—sinful human beings—there is always that temptation to swagger a bit, to get snooty or condescending toward those who are beneath you. Don't do it, Peter says.

DARRELL DELANEY

It kind of reminds me of something. So, going back to the shepherd concept, God entrusted the people to be good shepherds, and in Ezekiel 34, he says: You are not doing a good job, so I am going to fire you. I am

going to do it myself. And that is when he sends the Messiah to do it, and then the Messiah redeems it and gives it back to his people, the Church. It says: Now do it the way that I have done it, and do it the way that I have called you to. And sometimes we do make mistakes because we let these things kind of go to our heads, Scott, like we have a little bit of position, we like to tell people what to do; but if we remember that we are under-shepherds, like Peter says, and who is the real Shepherd—the Chief Shepherd? That would be Jesus. Then we can keep it in perspective.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; it is an interesting word there: Chief Shepherd. It is the only place in the Bible where that exact phrase occurs; again, Peter was probably remembering also the time that he was there when Jesus said: I am the Good Shepherd. We also know that there is a well-known benediction in Hebrews 13 that refers to that Great Shepherd of the sheep. So, there in Hebrews 13 is the Great Shepherd; Jesus called himself a Good Shepherd; but Chief Shepherd here...it only occurs here in 1 Peter 5.

But it is not just the elders who need to be addressed, right? So, Peter continues now in 1 Peter 5:5:

In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, (and here is a quote from Proverbs): God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble. ⁶(So) humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes, humility; I love the fact that he is reminding them...and he is actually tying together the fact that if the younger submit and humble themselves under the elders, then it is actually the ones who God has entrusted to this authority. So, if you are submitting to them, you are submitting to God. He is tying those together, but when you actually have a spirit that is humble, that is key to the components of what it means to be a Christian, I believe.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, he has already basically told the elders to be humble in their supervisory role...in their role as under-shepherds. Now, he is telling everybody else, including the younger ones: You have got to be humble, too. So, you know, in the Christian community, you know, we are kind of in this happy competition to see who can out-humble whom...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Can you out-humble someone? I don't know; but we should all be so busy submitting to one another and clothing ourselves with humility, that there won't be any time or place for pride or for arrogance or for, you know, being condescending toward others. Again, he quotes from Proverbs Chapter 3, here. God opposes the proud, shows favor to those who are humble. So, we submit to one another in humility, and above all, we humble ourselves under God's almighty hand; and when we do, God will use that same powerful hand, Darrell, to lift us up as well.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; it is a beautiful thing, because when we humble ourselves and we are not wise in our own eyes and we do not allow ourselves to believe our own press, then we are open to correction and accountability with our fellow brothers and sisters; and Jesus can actually show us how to become more like him, if we take that posture. It is something that we need and it is something that is going to definitely balance out how we show our witness. It is because of the humility, Scott.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; it is not *humiliation*. We are not being called to humiliate ourselves, we are not supposed to be humiliated by anybody else. Humility and humiliation are very different things. Humility is good;

humiliation isn't. But, you know, we have said this before on *Groundwork*, because this is the number one virtue you need if you want to look like Jesus. It is clear throughout the whole New Testament. So, humility means that we understand that when all of life's pluses and minuses are brought together, when all of us bring together our collective strengths and weaknesses, you know, everything kind of balances out. We see each other at eye level, on a level playing field; and when that happens, it won't be possible for us to look down our noses at others, or be condescending. We will just be too busy affirming one another; and we won't have to worry about ourselves, because everybody else will be affirming us. So, it is kind of a happy cycle.

DARRELL DELANEY

It is kind of the currency that Christians walk around giving each other without expecting anything in return; and Peter wants us to know that we are called to that; and that is what we do: We show the humility we are actually called as the Church to be Christ to one another; and as we continue and close out this episode, we want to look at how this letter concludes. So, stay with us.

Segment 3

SCOTT HOEZEE

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

DARRELL DELANEY

And I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Let's dig right back into 1 Peter 5, starting at verse 7, where Peter begins to close out this epistle with these words: Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. ⁸Be alert and be of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. ⁹Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

DARRELL DELANEY

I love it, Scott, because this verse is really helpful for me in the time...right now, in the 21st Century is really a time a lot of things that are around me that could make me very anxious; and the fact that God cares for me, and he wants me to actually cast my cares on him; I think that is a very comforting promise; and in the midst of what Peter is saying to these Christians who are being persecuted, there is a lot of anxiety to go around; and so, it is really good for him to remind people that God cares for you in your current context of suffering, and you have an outlet to give your cares to him.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; and then Peter evokes what has become a famous image of the devil, Peter says, prowls around us like a roaring lion, hungry for his next meal. It is actually kind of a frightening image; and you know, since we know that one form of persecution of the Roman Empire was literally feeding believers to actual lions in the arena, no doubt Peter was evoking that grim reality. But even if so, he is springboarding beyond it, too, because he knows the devil, Darrell, is nothing if not an opportunist. So, first the devil inspires persecution; so, he inspires people like Nero to hate Christians and to kill them; and then, the devil doubles down and tries to use the reality of that very persecution as a way to tempt believers to give up their faith; resist that, Peter says; stand firm.

DARRELL DELANEY

And so, he has actually got two different ways of attacking; and the good news is, Peter says that to resist him and stand firm in the faith, that means: They know that other Christians are going through the same thing, so they have solidarity with those who are suffering as well. So, they don't think that they are the only ones doing that; but it is possible to resist him. It is possible to stand firm in the faith.

So, for a Christian to understand and get hope in the fact that it is possible to resist these things and never give up your faith, that is a good thing for them to know that that is an option, because sometimes pain and suffering can make you forget those things.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; but now, Darrell, let's get to the real end of the letter, and we will start in verse 10.

DARRELL DELANEY

And it says: And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. ¹¹To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.

¹²With the help of Silas, whom I regard as a faithful brother, I have written to you briefly, encouraging you and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it. ¹³She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you her greetings, and so does my son Mark. ¹⁴Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace to all of you who are in Christ.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory after you have suffered a little while...that is a benediction a lot of us have probably heard spoken in churches over the years. It is a beautiful, beautiful benediction here that ministers all over the world, and missionaries have used as a closing benediction for worship for a long time; and it captures so much of this entire letter...you know, those words, Darrell...and it captures so much of actually the entire gospel in just a few short words. We have been called by the God of all grace, who saves us by grace alone; and that we suffer for now, will be, in the long run, only for a little while, and in the end God, and not suffering, will have the last word.

DARRELL DELANEY

The fact that God is eternal, a lot of things are "a little while." It reminds me of Jesus' teaching in the first place, because Jesus said: In a little while, you are not going to see me. In a little while, you will see me. So, for him, he is thinking that all of these things are momentary; and Paul picks this up in 2 Corinthians* where he says the sufferings are incomparable to the glory because these things are temporary, but that is eternal. And you want the eternal reward, that is what you want.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly, exactly; for the second time in this program, we have come to a verse that says: Amen; and it looks like the end, but there is a little PS on this letter after the Amen. He says that Silas helped him write this letter, and so, you know, he just...he says: Silas is a faithful brother and encourages them one more time to stand fast in the grace that God gives; again, there is sort of this staccato last-minute advice as he closes this out; and then, Darrell, there is this interesting reference that *she who is in Babylon* sends you her greetings. That is a very interesting turn of phrase.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; you know, some people refer to America as *she*, or some people refer to a nation of people as *she*, and I think that he is referring to the Christians who are in this situation as *she*. Paul has often looked at and called Rome Babylon, so it could be another symbolic reference there; but the idea is that the Christians who are with you, that you cannot see, we want to make sure you know they are around and they love you.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Babylon probably was a coded reference to Rome, which tells some scholars that Peter may have been in Rome...

DARRELL DELANEY

Okay.

SCOTT HOEZEE

When he wrote this letter. So, it reminds me of the end of Romans, you know, where Paul, as he closes out the letter to the Romans, he says: Oh, by the way, the Christian believers who are in Caesar's household send you their greetings, too. It is like, wow; Caesar's got Christians right under his nose and he doesn't even know it. So, Babylon probably is a coded reference for Rome. But just by including that, Peter is reminding the believers that God, not Rome, Jesus Christ the Lord, not Caesar, who only thinks he is a lord, that is who is going to have the last word; and that is an encouraging word here, I think, for the believers to whom Peter also is writing.

DARRELL DELANEY

I think it is a beautiful reminder for us today. No matter what is going on with politics or with racism or with discrimination or with any of the things that are against God's will, they will not have the final say. Cancer will not have the final say; Alzheimer's won't have the final say. The way God is governing these things and how shalom will be brought in when Christ returns will have the final say, and it can give us hope in situations that are challenging.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; he also mentions Mark, who could be John Mark; and Mark and Peter were connected. In fact, a lot of people think Peter was Mark's primary information source for the Gospel of Mark.

So, that is the end of the letter; and so, all of us who suffer, all of us who are persecuted, all of us who face opposition, all of us who get criticized, this letter comes along, Darrell, to encourage us. Again, suffering does not mean God has abandoned us. Suffering does not mean we are getting something we deserve because we did something bad. Rather, in Christ Jesus, we have been given a new identity—a new birth into a living hope. We have been built into a spiritual edifice whose cornerstone is the living stone of Jesus. The world hates that new identity. It hates being told there is only one cosmic Lord to follow. So, we do come under attack sometimes, but in the end, stay strong, Peter says; and to all of you who are listening to this *Groundwork* episode, we will conclude as Peter does when we say: Peace to all of you who are in Christ.

DARRELL DELANEY

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 begin our study of 2 Peter with a discussion of Chapter 1.

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SCOTT HOEZEE

Groundwork is a listener supported program produced by ReFrame Ministries. Visit reframeministries.org for more information.

***Correction:** The audio of this program misstates this reference as 1 Corinthians. The correct reference for the verse Darrell is paraphrasing is 2 Corinthians 4:17. Paul also makes a similar statement in Romans 8:18.

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Printed on July 30, 2025