

Questions about the Faith of Our Families

SCOTT HOEZEE

We desire to nurture the faith of the young and impressionable children in our lives. We long to support and encourage the faith of a spouse, of our siblings, of our friends, even sometimes when their choices are beyond our control; but loved ones who don't believe, or who are struggling with their faith weigh heavily on our hearts; and in all these situations, we care deeply about the faith life of those we love. Today on *Groundwork*, we wanted to dig into scripture to answer questions you have sent us about the faith lives of others, and particularly of those whom we know and love. Stay tuned.

DAVE BAST

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Dave, as we just said, this is one of two listener question programs that we are doing. All year long our *Groundwork* listeners, those who listen to us on the radio or online or in podcasts, interact with us on Facebook and e-mails and good old-fashioned letters, and send in questions; and a lot of the questions that have come in this year are about faith. So, in the previous listener question program, we talked about what is faith; how can you nurture your faith; how can you grow in your faith; and in this program, we want to talk about what we can say and do about the faith life of other people in our lives, particularly in our families.

DAVE BAST

And particularly of our children, because that is an issue that was raised frequently. In order to address these kinds of questions: What about faith in my teenaged daughter? How can I lead her in a way that will help her keep her faith? How can I disciple my children or strengthen their faith? So, we have actually brought into the studio today with us a special guest. We are really excited to welcome her. Her name is Deb Koster. Deb is an ordained minister in the Christian Reformed Church, and also a writer, producer, and speaker on *Family Fire*, which is a sister ministry to *Groundwork*. It is part of the ReFrame Media family of ministries. It is an online community that specifically discusses these kinds of questions about faith and family and relationships. So, Deb, welcome to *Groundwork*.

DEB KOSTER

Yes; thanks so much for having me here today.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We want to start, Deb and Dave, with talking about nurturing the faith of children, which is something, Deb, that you think a lot about in your work with *Family Fire*, and in your interactions with people. We know biblically that it is important to do this; so let's talk a little bit about sort of the biblical foundations for why this is sort of what is expected of us as believers; and then we will get into talking a little bit, especially about children, of what are some of the best ways to do that.

DEB KOSTER

Well, as we look at all the research that is out there right now, it is really critical that we start with ourselves; that we ourselves are embracing a faith that is contagious. We want our children to really catch their faith. We cannot expect that they are just going to pick up on things. We want them to be hearing from our mouths that we love Jesus; that we love God's Word; and really go back to the *Shema*. I know that is such a foundational text. It was so important to the Jews, this Deuteronomy 6 text about God's commandments are to be on our hearts; that we are loving God with all of our whole person, and that is the foundation, out of which we can start to spread faith to our children and to others.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; let's hear that from Deuteronomy Chapter 6. *Shema*, which you just referred to, Deb, is the Hebrew word for listen—hear. So, shema, O Israel...⁴Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. ⁵Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength. (And now this) ⁶These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts, ⁷and impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home, when you walk along the road, when you lie down, when you get up. ⁸Tie them as symbols on your hands; bind them on your foreheads; write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

So, there it is, Dave and Deb; God's love affair with the human family is a family affair.

DAVE BAST

Yes, very much so; and I love some of that imagery, which still observant Jews, especially Orthodox Jews, take literally, and will bind God's Word on their forehead or on their wrist or on the doorposts of their house. So, there will be a little symbol or a text next to the front door; but for us, Deb, as you said, the faith is more caught than taught; so the number one thing if we are concerned about our children is that we are setting them a living example of people who love God ourselves and love his Word. If our kids hear us kind of critical about church or indifferent about going ourselves, or hey, let's just take this week off, or never see us sitting down with the Bible ourselves, then we shouldn't expect that they are going to come to love those things either.

DEB KOSTER

Yes; I think we have to remember that children are passion detectors. Children...they catch on to what we care about. You know, when you are passionate about your favorite team or your favorite show, your kids pick up on it, and they start caring about those things, too; and it is important for us to share our passion for God's Word. I think culturally we have been people who think about our devotional time as quiet time, and it misses the fact that we are supposed to be interacting and connecting with God's Word and sharing how it is changing us, and how it is transforming our being; and when we can get excited and get passionate about those things, our kids will catch on to those passions. Christian Smith talks about, you know, we get what we are, which I think is maybe too strong a language, because our children will make their own decisions, and they are not completely picking up our faith and making it their own; but it is true that our passions really play an impact into what gets picked up in our children.

SCOTT HOEZEE

In terms of...so, they pick up our passion and they will also know if we are faking it or if it doesn't matter to us. They are also really good at detecting things that we are faking it about. So, we need to be passionate about the faith, but when we also do what Deuteronomy 6 just said...when we also overtly talk about it with them, what are some things...let's think about younger children now, say 10 and under...12 and under, or whatever...what are some ways to overtly talk about and try to teach them things?

DEB KOSTER

You know, as you look at that text, it talks about some specific times. It talks about when you sit at home. To me, that is the conversations around the dinner table, that you are opening God's Word and you are having conversations about it. You are talking about God as you are meandering down the road. You know, we think

about our travel times to and from, but we are pointing out as we go where we see God at work. So, if we are able to show our children, look, God is busy in these things; and it also talks about the beginning of the day and the end of the day. Are we beginning our day with an acknowledgment that God is sovereign over whatever is going to happen today? So, with my family in the morning, we would gather; we would hold hands before my kids went out the door, and we would pray over whatever the concerns of the day were; and that would help our kids to remember that God is in all this; and the other time of the day they mention is the end of the day. When we end our day are we thanking God for his presence through all of the challenges and things that came up? Are we acknowledging that God was in that, and God was equipping us, and he was present through all of that. So, in all of these little parts of the day, are we pointing to how God is at work and how he is an active part of our lives?

DAVE BAST

You know, it strikes me, too, that not just in families, but as congregations we can be about some of this as well; and I think of the Jewish practice at the Passover table of having the youngest child ask: Why do we do this? It reminds me, recently was in my own church at a communion service and a new, young pastor—a female—was serving communion, and she had a number of the children come up and ask those questions in a Jewish kind of way: Why do we break this bread? Why do we pour out this cup? Why do we...? And it was just such a wonderful teaching moment that I thought, you know, we ought to be doing this more often.

DEB KOSTER

Yes; and every age in the congregation is going to grow and learn from that; that they are going to hear it, and that message gets reinforced, that we see God's grace in these things.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It reminds me of...Neal Plantinga has always said that...for preachers, too...if you can preach in a way that 12-year-olds will understand, their parents and grandparents are going to get it, too, and it is all going to work together to nurture the faith.

DAVE BAST

Well, speaking of age, lets talk a little bit more about how we can continue to share the faith with our children as they grow older. We will do that next.

Segment 2

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, along with Dave Bast, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, where today we are also welcoming as a guest, Deb Koster from the ministry *Family Fire*; and Deb is with us because we are talking about issues related to the family. We were just talking about how to nurture faith in young children, and Deb had a lot of good suggestions there; but now we want to talk about sort of the children as they get older...as they become teenagers...maybe when they start asking harder questions, or facing some hard decisions; maybe a little bit about adult children; but among the questions...and this is a listener question program, as we said...so, some of you have asked questions like: How can I trust that God will guide my adult children? One listener wrote: How can I encourage my husband to stop waiting for things to happen spiritually, but to help him get more active with prayer and faith and trusting God? So, we want to talk a little bit about that as well.

DAVE BAST

Yes; you know, I mean, it is one thing...and I have wonderful, precious memories, as I am sure Scott and you do too, Deb, of our little kids when they are young and kneeling with them by the bedside and praying and talking about Jesus; but then comes, you know, a more awkward stage of life, and perhaps sometimes rebellious teens; or even a spouse maybe who isn't as alive spiritually as we would wish for and pray for. So, are there ways, Deb, to influence people in that kind of situation?

DEB KOSTER

Yes, absolutely; you know, I think of when my own kids were going through those teenage years, and I think that one of the important things was learning to wonder...to be able to look at the scriptures and be able to say I wonder what they were experiencing there? I wonder how they were feeling? I wonder how things... You know, I think kids get turned off by faith that looks too black and white; and I think we have to be okay with doubt, and we have to be okay with sometimes this stuff is hard, and we don't know all the perfect answers. I think our kids need to hear that we are struggling with things, too; that there are things that we don't understand. You know, we experience things and we say: I am going to have to talk to God about that because I really don't know why that happened...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

DEB KOSTER

Or why somebody went through that situation.

DAVE BAST

I am thinking of a group that I was leading in a Bible study once, and I told them I can answer any question you have about the Bible; and they all kind of sat back and I said as long as "I don't know," is an acceptable answer.

DEB KOSTER

Absolutely.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, and you were saying, Deb, in the first segment, that younger children, even 12 and under, are really good at detecting where our passions lie. If we are passionate about something, they are going to catch that. It can even be enthusiasm for a sports team, but certainly enthusiasm for the things of God; but what I hear you saying now, Deb, is something that I think we have been hearing more and more about that group called Gen Z* now...sort of the people born since the year 2000 who are now late teens, maybe even the late 1990s, so they are moving into their 20s; and one thing that I have heard quite often, Deb, is that authenticity has become so important; and so, this is also sort of a build-in detector young people seem to have today, that if you are fake, if you are skirting the hard questions, they are going to know.

DEB KOSTER

Yes, absolutely; you know, we think of Paul saying: Follow me as I follow Christ...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

DEB KOSTER

And how comfortable are we to say that to our own children? We know that we are going to mess up; we know that we are going to screw up; and we need to have the authenticity to come back and say I really blew it on this and I need you to hear from me that that was not a Christlike approach that I took when I spoke to you like that, and we want to do better. Let me apologize and let's make a fresh start. If our kids can see that we are accountable to God...that we are living into that relationship and we are finding forgiveness and healing, I think that lends a lot to them being able to hear our faith lived out in our actions.

DAVE BAST

I think, picking up on what you said, Deb, about our own doubts, maybe, as well as our failures, to be able to convey to our kids or a spouse or just some friend, there are things we don't understand, and also that no

question is out of bounds.

DEB KOSTER

Yes.

DAVE BAST

We are encouraged by the Psalms, for example, to just say anything and everything to God; that God is big enough to absorb our doubts, our fears, our anger. There is nothing out of bounds that we are not allowed to talk about.

DEB KOSTER

Yes, and I think there is a piece that we need to give up this idea that somehow Christians have it all together. You know, like that is just such a phony Christianity that is never, never going to resonate with our kids, because like you say, they can tell when things aren't genuine. So, we need to be really honest about how we live our lives.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I think, you know, we sometimes treat the church as a gathering of the people who have it all together, right? And you know, I remember hearing a pastor saying once...he said: Yes, I talked to somebody who said: Once I get my spiritual act together, then I will come back to church; and this pastor said: That is a little like saying: Well, once my inflamed appendix kind of calms down on its own, then I will check into the hospital. It's like, no, the church is the place for strugglers and stragglers, and that is why we are there, to help each other through the muddled middle of life; and as you say, Deb, I think teenagers and millennials react really, really well to that note of authenticity.

DAVE BAST

Deb, talk a little bit about how to get along with family members, adult children perhaps, or emerging adult children, or other loved ones who may have a very different political take, for example, than we do; or a very different take on a given issue of the day; and yet, we are one in Christ somehow. How do we hold that together?

DEB KOSTER

Yes, I think those things are hard. You know, faith is communicated in relationship, and if we want our faith to be conveyed, then we have to preserve the relationship. We have got to put aside some of these differences that are extraneous. You know, we need to focus on the important things; and rather than feeling a need to be right or to convey a point, we want our children to experience the absolute love of God in our presence. You know, we want them to know that they are loved and that they are cared for, and that this is a safe place where we can disagree, and we don't have to have the same opinions about every other thing, but we are going to focus on the fact that we are children made in God's image, and we love each other; and we are going to persist in our relationship with one another.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is so very important. Well, we have been talking about children, teens, and family members who may be struggling with faith or dealing with the issues of faith and the hard questions of faith, but as we close the program, we want to answer some of your questions about how are we to think about family members, including our children and grandchildren, who seem to have absolutely left the faith? What do we do and think then? We will talk about that in just a moment.

Segment 3

DAVE BAST

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

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee.

DEB KOSTER

And I am Deb Koster.

DAVE BAST

And Deb, we want to spend our remaining time talking about the very difficult and painful question of what do we do when our kids are not walking with the Lord; they seem to have left the faith; we did everything we could when they were little; we prayed for them...and you know, it is especially hard because it seems to contradict the Bible. You know, that verse in Proverbs: ^{22:6}Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it. But there are many who apparently have, so how do we deal with that?

DEB KOSTER

I think it is painful. I think we have to acknowledge the pain; we have to, you know, lament the hurt that these parents are feeling; and I think so many parents carry guilt with this, and we need to help them see this is their child's choice, it is not theirs to make; and encourage them to keep praying for those kids and to keep loving those kids. You know, I think of folks I know who are trying so passionately to evangelize their children that they have lost relationship with them, and that is a dangerous place to be. We want to hold onto relationships so that our faith can actually permeate. We will not have any way to translate our faith if we set up barriers by trying to be forceful and evangelizing; but we pray passionately for them, and we believe Philippians 1:6, I want to say is a text that we have confidence that he who began a good work in them will carry it to completion, and we hold onto that and we pray hard for those that we love, and we have to live out our faith in a way that is very visible and intentional without beating them over the head with it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that idea of praying is so important, Deb. I was privileged to get to know my great grandmother Hoezee. She lived long enough that I knew her fairly well, and one of her sons, who was my great uncle, the brother of my grandpa, had left the faith apparently in his 20s, and had lived a very secular life out in Seattle for many, many years. He moved back to Michigan...to Zeeland, Michigan...and came back to the faith. He fell in love with a Christian woman. They both were widowed, but they got married, and he became an elder in the church. We were visiting with my great grandmother and she said: I prayed for that boy for fifty years; yes, it shows what a little prayer will do for you. Now, I was 17 at the time; I had been praying for three weeks that a girl in high school would start liking me. Three weeks seemed like forever to pray; and here she said a *little* prayer...fifty years of praying for her son, and indeed, in that case, it was...it doesn't always happen...but in that case, he came back to the faith.

DAVE BAST

It reminds me of a famous story about St. Monica, the mother of St. Augustine. St. Augustine was a bit of a wild fellow in his youth, and she prayed and prayed, and was told that it was impossible for the child of so many tears ever to be lost, and eventually he was famously converted. So, I do think we need to hang onto the promises of God; even the promises made in baptism. No, we don't believe that baptism automatically saves a baby or a child; yes, they need, as you say, to make their own decision eventually. They have to make faith real for themselves; but nevertheless, God has promised to be a God to us and to our children, and I think we can claim that promise and hang onto it.

DEB KOSTER

Yes, absolutely; and you know, with *Family Fire* we have a lot of work that we do with marriages that are in crisis, and so much of that is a spouse that is not believing. Right now we have a closed Facebook group that has over 900 women in it that are praying for their marriages to come to faith, and for the spouse to come to faith, and for their marriage to find healing; and I believe that God hears these passionate prayers. These

women join together and they are praying for each other and encouraging each other; and I think we have to recognize that there is a spiritual bit of warfare happening. You know, we need to be on our knees for one another. It is a powerful thing when we can pray and have the Holy Spirit doing the work, because we cannot change somebody else's life...

DAVE BAST

Yes, right; no kidding.

DEB KOSTER

God has control of their hearts and we don't.

DAVE BAST

The god of this age has blinded their eyes, Paul says of unbelievers, and it takes a supernatural work to open those eyes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It reminds me of Paul's words in Ephesians 1, where he says: ¹⁸I pray that the eyes of your hearts may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you; the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people; ^{19a}and his incomparably great power for us who believe.

So, there it is. The Apostle Paul couldn't force people to believe, but he could just pray that their eyes would be opened. You get all the hope of the prophets, too; of Jeremiah and others saying: Your descendents...you have been in exile, literally, but you will return to the land.

So, the Bible has all kinds of that kind of hope in it; and hope in the power of prayer, particularly for those who are in exile—self-imposed or otherwise.

DEB KOSTER

Yes; and I think scripture is important; that you know, if we are keeping someone who is struggling with faith...keeping them wrestling with God. You know, if we can encourage engagement in God's Word or in faith, church attendance with our kids, that is super helpful because the more they are wrestling these things out with God, the more they have that opportunity for God to really do a transformative work in their hearts.

DAVE BAST

So says the Apostle: We ought always to pray and not lose heart. Well, thank you once again to Deb Koster for joining us.

DEB KOSTER

Yes; thanks so much for having me.

DAVE BAST

And thank you for listening and digging deeply into scripture with us on *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Dave Bast and Scott Hoezee. 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 next on *Groundwork*.

***Correction:** The audio of this program misidentifies Gen Z as Millennials. People born from 1996 – present are classified as Gen Z while people born from 1980 – 1996 are classified as Millennials.

<https://groundworkonline.com/episodes/questions-about-the-faith-of-our-families>

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