
Your Questions about God's Care and the Life of Faith

DARRELL DELANEY

Having faith in God might be as simple as believing in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, but maintaining that faith does not always feel as easy. Each season of life brings new situations that impact our journey of faith. Thankfully, our God is big and invites us to bring him both our joys and our laments; our confidence and our questions. He also gives us people and resources to build up and encourage our faith along the way. Let's turn to scripture together to let God's Word speak to some of the questions and issues we all ask at different moments in our lives of faith. 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.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And Darrell, you were kind of talking about this in the introduction just a minute ago, that, you know, the life of faith is not a linear one, right? We experience ups and downs; moments of great clarity; moments of confusion; seasons of joy; seasons of questions. You know, we all face that, and we appreciate that our listeners, Darrell, often send us emails or regular letters or Facebook messages throughout the year, where they ask questions, and in this program, we want to take up a few of the questions that folks have sent in.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; so, you know, we do surveys and we appreciate the responses that we have when people share their experiences with us, because it helps us to inform our blogs and our on-air content like this; and every now and then, we stop and we have a listener question episode, and we have a couple of them, and we have done this one, and this today is one of the ways we want to get to the bottom of those and help people understand where we are going and what scripture has to say about it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, here is a question that somebody sent in, and it touches on a very, very interesting topic biblically and theologically: Does God truly care for us as individuals? That is the question: Does God truly care for us as individuals? Darrell, although, you know, I think it can be difficult to wrap our minds around this, but actually, a core tenet of our Christian faith is that the answer is: Yes, God does care for us as individuals.

DARRELL DELANEY

It is very clear, and scripture has shown all over the Bible, Old and New Testament, that God cares for individuals. I mean, if you look at Genesis Chapter 16, you see that we have the scene where Hagar is being sent away and she has her son Ishmael; and God appears to them and says: I will take care of you; I will bless him; and so, she names him the God who sees—the one who sees: *El Ro'i**.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, if God is not intimately connected to people, she would not have felt, as a mother who is going on her own with her son, that he saw her need and he met her right where she was.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; you know, I mean, there have been billions of people who have lived all through history and on the earth right now; but God being God, he is able to keep track of them all. I mean, I've got about forty-five students this semester, and it is hard for me to learn all their names; then once the course is over, I kind of forget half of them. Then I see them in the hallway and: What was that name again? But God can do this, and he does do this. Darrell, one of the things that we see in the Old Testament in particular is that, of course, Israel was absolutely amazed by God's awesome power and his might and his strength and his glory, but they were even more bowled over by the fact that this huge God sees us in our littleness; and the classic of this is from Psalm 8: ¹Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory in the heavens. ³When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, ⁴what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them? ⁵You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, it is really interesting, in that verse he is talking about the transcendence of God...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

The glory of the heavens; and then he is talking about the eminence of God right there: You are mindful of me. Out of all the things in the universe, you are paying close attention to me in my life; and I think in the New Testament Jesus picks this up when he talks about how the heavenly Father takes care of all the sparrows, but you? You are worth more than many sparrows; even the very hairs on your head are numbered. So, our Father is paying very close attention to even count the number of hairs on our head. I think that that shows that he is very careful and loves us individually.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; so, one of my favorite parables...a lot of people's favorite parables...is in Luke 15. So, we are talking about what Jesus has said. So, we can listen to these words: Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. ²But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." ³Then Jesus told this parable: ⁴"Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? ⁵And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' ⁷I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent."

DARRELL DELANEY

I think in this passage, this is like one of a three-corded strand...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DARRELL DELANEY

Sheep, coin, and son; and each one has more valuable things happening—more valuable things that are lost and found; and it is just showing the Father’s heart that why would he leave the ninety-nine to go find the one if he was not caring about the individual. So, Jesus is showing that it is very important for us to know that God cares about the individual sheep; and therefore, we are one of the individual sheep.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; years ago, a former New Testament professor at Calvin Seminary...and of course, I sat in on to grade sermons...he always assigned the parable of the lost sheep. So, I read a lot of lost sheep sermons over the years, but a lot of the students ran across this line: God counts by ones. God counts by ones; and I think that is, indeed, true.

You know, God, just again, to go back to the Old Testament, Darrell, we could think of Psalm 146 as well, and let’s hear some of those words.

DARRELL DELANEY

⁶He is the maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them—he remains faithful forever. ⁷He upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets prisoners free, ⁸the Lord gives sight to the blind, the Lord lifts up those who are bowed down, the Lord loves the righteous. ⁹The Lord watches over the foreigner and sustains the fatherless and the widow.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, what you get here in Psalm 146, Darrell, is that triplet that is often known as the *Anawim*...sort of the poor...so it is always: the widow, the orphan, and the stranger...the immigrant in your midst. And God has a special place in his heart for them. So again, we are answering the question: Does God actually care for us as individuals? Again and again in the Bible, the answer is, indeed, yes.

DARRELL DELANEY

It is true; and then when we turn to Jesus, we see that his personal care is embodied...because he calls himself the Good Shepherd. In John 10, he talks about being the shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep, but also that he knows his sheep and his sheep know him. He leads them out and he calls them by name; not just flocks, not just crowds, but names and faces and stories.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; and you know, Jesus in his ministry, too...he was so pastoral and personal, right? When he healed a woman one time, he then calls her *daughter* very tenderly. When he calls Zacheus out of the tree, he uses his name: Zacheus, you know, come down here. I gotta stay at your house today. So, Jesus always had the ability to spy the lonely person or the person on the fringes and bring them into the middle of things; and we see that a lot in Luke’s gospel. It is kind of a major theme in Luke’s gospel, that those who are afar off are brought to the center of things...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Those who have been cut off from community are brought back into community; and indeed, that woman who had the flow of blood for twelve years is the one who Jesus called *daughter*. So, she had been literally on the fringes. She was not allowed, really, to come into society. So, Jesus restored her physically, but also socially and spiritually because he cares for us that much.

Maybe as we kind of come to the end of this part of the program, Darrell, we will go back to the Old Testament in a passage I preached on years ago to a youth service. At the time, I titled the sermon: God’s palm pilot, because back then, palm pilots were a big deal...kind of before we got our smartphone revolution going...but here is the text I preached on from Isaiah 49: ¹⁴But Zion said, “The Lord has forsaken me, the Lord has forgotten me.” (Then God responds:) ¹⁵“Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no

compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! ¹⁶See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands.”

So again, Darrell, does God care for us as individuals? The biblical answer, Old Testament and New, is a resounding yes!

Well, we want to get to some more of your questions, and we will do that in just a moment; so, stay tuned.

Segment 2

DARRELL DELANEY

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

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we want to take up some more of the questions you have sent us, and here is one that we got from a listener: What is my role right now in my walk with God? So, I mean, this is really a question about discipleship; and we may have some related ones that we may get to yet in this part of the program. It is about discipleship. I like the German word...I was a German major in college...the word Dietrich Bonhoeffer also used in *The Cost of Discipleship*, the German word is *nachfolgen*, which literally means to *follow after*, and that is what we do as disciples. Jesus comes, as he did for the disciples: Follow me; and that is what we do. This listener is wondering: Well, what all is involved in discipleship? What is my role right now in my walk with God?

DARRELL DELANEY

I think Jesus makes this clear in his invitation in John Chapter 15, where he says: ^{5a}“I am the vine; you are the branches. ^{5b} (paraphrased) You remain in me and I remain in you. And if you do that, then you will bear much fruit.

Before I try to personally...you know, if I try to do anything or produce anything for God, first my role is to abide in Christ. Doing for God comes second; being with God comes first. So, I am in the busy season right now. We are both teaching in classes, and we know we’ve got to get all the work together; and sometimes we are preaching, now and then. We’ve got a lot of different roles: We wear a husband hat; we wear a father hat; we wear a family hat; and all those things are happening at the same time. But if we start our morning with a short passage like this and say: Okay, what does obedience look like today? What does it mean? Sometimes it means I have to silence a phone call or notification; and sometimes it means that I will choose patience for my kids when I would much rather be efficient; because abiding is what we are called to do, and that is not a passive thing, Scott.

SCOTT HOEZEE

No, no; it is active; and we can only do it...apart from me you can do no good, Jesus says; so we have got to abide; we have got to be grafted into that vine as offshoots of Jesus himself; and you know, when you really get down to it...you think about the ministry of John the Baptist. He really shook people up. So, you know, people say: What do we do? What do we do? What do we do? And what John tells them...these are acts of discipleship...they are not huge, life-changing, world-shattering things. It is like: Well, be generous; share; do your job well and competently. If you are a guard for Rome, don’t take people down. Just be honest; share; be generous. This is not rocket science. It reminds me of Micah 6:8, which sums up a lot of what following God in the Old Testament was all about, but it really sums up what Jesus says, too:

He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

That is what is all tied up, really, in discipleship; and again, as somebody once said, that is not rocket science. And you know, Darrell, we also did recently here on *Groundwork*...we did a series on the kingdom of God, and we said repeatedly: As church communities, as individuals in the church, we want to reflect kingdom values in everything we do. We want to be walking advertisements for the goodness of the kingdom of God.

DARRELL DELANEY

I think it is beautiful how, if you tie those two verses together, the one in John 15 and the byproduct of abiding in Jesus is bearing fruit, and that fruit is shown here in Micah 6. The fruit is doing justice; the fruit is

loving mercy; the fruit is walking humbly. You are going to do that in your homes, your schools, your jobs, your campus, and your community; in your extracurricular activities and even in your social networks. I have seen people use social media as a way to shine their light and share their faith in powerful ways. So then, you can use that. That is the discipleship you are talking about. It is going to show itself. When you be with God and you do for God, they come together.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And of course, as we do this in this world...this world is still broken...we are not yet fully who we need to be as followers of Christ, so we have ups and downs. So, another listener sent in a question about overcoming fleshly habits. How do we overcome the habits of the flesh and how do we find deeper freedom as we walk along with God? I think that is a very important question.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; so, in Galatians Paul talks about the spirit and the flesh war, if you will; and he says in [Chapter 5 verse 16 paraphrased]: If you walk by the Spirit, you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. ²²For the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

This is the freedom that we are called to, and that freedom is not white-knuckling until you resist the temptation: No; but freedom is actually us keeping in step with the Spirit in places where we usually stumble.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; starting with our baptisms, Darrell, we are in this life now. So, justification: that is one fell swoop because of the finished work of Jesus. Sanctification is an ongoing process that we will never be done with this side of heaven, but we do work on it. It reminds me of Paul in Colossians 3: ⁵Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. ⁶Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. ⁷You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. ⁸But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. ⁹Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices ¹⁰and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. ¹²Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. ¹³Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. ¹⁴Over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

DARRELL DELANEY

I think we could also talk about the change of clothes there—the old clothes and the new clothes. It is really beautiful to see because we are seated in the heavenly realms with Christ, as Paul says in the beginning of that chapter. He gives us the power to put to death those things that will cause us to be tempted—that will cause us to try to fall into these trials that we go in; but also 1 John 1 is there for us, too, where it reads: ⁵This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. ⁶If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. ⁷But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; and again, this is the description of our light; we continue to try to walk in that light; we continue to need to resist temptations to kind of, as it were, go back to the darkness. It is indeed an ongoing thing. We know that God's grace is more than sufficient to forgive all our sins. So, when we fail, Darrell...when we fall down and stumble along the path of discipleship, the Spirit picks us back up. God will forgive us, but behind forgiving grace is always *renewing* grace, right? And you know, maybe it is good at the start of each day, Darrell, and maybe at the end of each day, just sort of ask how we are doing and how could we do better?

DARRELL DELANEY

I think accountability also helps there, too. So, for me to overcome any habits that I am struggling with, I will ask a friend: Hey, check in on me, you know; how am I doing? I want to check in with you by the end of the week, and then you can pray with me on this. I have also incorporated some fasting that helps in those situations; but the Spirit can give you the power you need in order to actually overcome these things. But as we continue, we want to talk about what is coming up next with a few more questions. So, stay tuned.

Segment 3

SCOTT HOEZEE

You are listening 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.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And as we close out this listener-question program, we've got a couple of questions that are very pastoral in nature: Suffering...people struggle with suffering; we all struggle. How do we make sense of suffering? And then another listener asks: I trust God's personal timing and his mysterious grace in these ups and downs. I think one thing we can say at the beginning here, Darrell, is that Jesus and the New Testament generally make it clear that being a Christian does not give you the proverbial get out of jail free card, right? We know from Jesus' own lips that we are to expect suffering; we are to expect persecution.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes, it is true; and the Bible does not shy away from that reality—the reality of suffering. I mean, the Psalms are partly laments, where David is crying out, like in Psalm 13. He says: How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? Why hast thou forsaken me? Will you hide your face from me? These kinds of prayers allow us to bring our raw and real, authentic selves to God. We don't hide them. We don't keep silent; but this is naming that stuff, and that is a good thing. That is what God wants us to do.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; and again, Jesus himself said this. In John 16, this is the farewell discourses in John. They are in the upper room on the night in which Jesus is betrayed; and in John 16 Jesus says: "All this I have told you so that you will not fall away. ²They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, the time is coming when anyone who kills you will think they are offering a service to God. ³They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me. ⁴I have told you this, so that when their time comes you will remember that I warned you about them."

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; I really wish Jesus would have said: Hey, when I leave, everything is going to be great. You are going to have harmony in your relationships. There is not going to be any war, no famine, anything like that. But he actually promises trouble. He says you are going to have some trouble, especially if there is no servant who is greater than his master. I suffered; therefore, you will suffer if you follow me and you walk in my name. Then, you know, Peter says this. He says: Don't make it peculiar; don't feel like it is strange that you suffer for being a Christian. Actually, it is part and parcel of walking with Christ. Suffering comes with it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; the disciple is not greater than the master; and the master suffered. The master was put to death. If that is how they treated Jesus, don't be too surprised that you who are closely associated with Jesus will suffer.

But there are also other kinds of suffering, too, you know; and early Christians, I think, struggled with some of these things. In some places, Darrell, there seems to have been a belief that once you are saved...once you

are baptized... that nobody would die before Jesus came again...before the second coming. In a place like Thessalonica, believers started to die, and this created a crisis. Like, whoa, wait a minute; we didn't think anybody would die anymore before Jesus returns with the fullness of his kingdom. What is going on? So, in 1 Thessalonians 4**, Paul has to take this head-on:

¹³Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. ¹⁴For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. ¹⁵According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, we see in this situation that he is addressing things that we have questions about: Suffering brings questions. Also, the New Testament talks about, in Romans Chapter 5, (verses 3,4) That we glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴perseverance, character; and character, hope.

Now, when these people in Thessalonica were sitting on their roofs and waiting for Jesus to come back, he said: No, you have to get up and work; you have to actually do something with your life. You cannot just sit around and wait for God to come back. What we see here is that he is addressing the situation of what do we do when we lose our loved ones and how do we respond? So, also in Romans we are told to rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn; so that, not only do we get up and do the work that he has called us to do, but we don't ignore our feelings in the process.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; but again, suffering...illness...they raise lots of questions for us, even as they did for the early Christians; even as they have done all along Church history; and you know, when somebody is ill in a congregation, we pray; and we pray for restoration; we pray for healing. Sometimes it comes, sometimes it doesn't. We pray for one child and he gets well; we pray for another child and he passes away; and then we start wondering what are the reasons for, you know. Well, did the parents of the child who got well have stronger faith than the parents of the child who died? We don't know that; we cannot know that; don't say that; don't think that. It is way too complicated to be oversimplified. In fact, in Luke 13 people would ruin this sometimes in the New Testament: Oh, we gotta figure out why people died. It must be because they were worse than others; and Jesus says in Luke 13:

Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. ²Jesus answered, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? ³I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. ⁴Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? ⁵I tell you, no!

So, in the middle of suffering, don't come to conclusions you cannot come to, right? It is like in John 9, the man born blind: Hey, Lord; who sinned? This guy or his folks? And Jesus says: Neither. It doesn't work that way. Don't make such simplistic things. It is an area of profound mystery, Darrell.

DARRELL DELANEY

It is an area of profound mystery; and speaking of mystery, that is going into the next question of how we trust God's personal timing and his mysterious grace? I think waiting on God is one of the hardest parts of the discipleship that you are talking about here, Scott. I know that Ecclesiastes Chapter 3 talks about there is a time and season for everything, and that includes the season that we cannot choose; those seasons where God does things, and we don't know what he is doing, but sometimes we have to trust him.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Isaiah 55: ⁸"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord. ⁹"As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."

Now, that doesn't mean that we don't know anything about God. That doesn't mean we don't understand a thing, we are just flying blind here, but for the whys and the wherefores of what happens in life, sometimes we just...we are too finite. We are not going to figure it out. God's got this thing somehow; the things that are mysterious to us may be less mysterious to God, or not mysterious to God at all. In the walk of discipleship, we have been kind of thinking about in this episode, we walk with trust.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; both suffering and waiting confront us with limits that we would rather avoid. Yet, both become classrooms, where God teaches a dependence, a hope, and a trust. Jesus himself suffered, so we trust the Father's timing; and he did all the way to the cross. In that way, we can because he is our example; and with his patience and with his grace working through us, and knowing that he is never absent, that will be enough for today; thanks be to God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Thanks for digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Scott Hoezee and Darrell Delaney. Join us again next time as we continue to dig deeply into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives.

We have a website: groundworkonline.com. Go there, share what *Groundwork* means to you; make suggestions for future *Groundwork* programs.

DARRELL DELANEY

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

*Correction: The audio of this program misstates that *Adonai Ravi* is the Hebrew word for "the God who sees." when in *Adonai* is Hebrew for "Lord" and *Ravi* is Hebrew for "rabbi." The Hebrew word for used in Genesis 16:13 meaning "the God who sees" is *El Ro'i*.

**Correction: The audio of this program misstates the reference for this passage as 1 Thessalonians 1. The correct reference is 1 Thessalonians 4.

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