

Desperate For Hope
Episode 1
From Desperation to Delight: A Journey of Faith and Lament

[00:00:00]

Vaneetha: I am so excited to be here with my sister Shalini, which, her name rhymes with Colony, which that's the only way other people remember how to say it. I will call her Shal a lot, but you are not allowed to do that, so you guys get to call her Shalini anyway. Um, so she is my best friend. My sister, she's a year older than me.

And she knows all the secrets of my life, so I can't really believe I'm letting her come live on this show and she's gonna say stuff and I'm not gonna be able to refute it. So just know that, I dunno exactly what she's gonna say. But I'm excited about this conversation and, would love to just get started.

But before we start, Shalini, could you just tell us where you live and what you're involved with?

Shalini: I live in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and I'm involved with a lot of spiritual formation. [00:01:00] Conversations and teaching, in the church and in, some academic settings. And that's where my life is settled. And I know you've asked me something about myself, but you said we had to start with your story.

So we're gonna start with your, I'm gonna ask you, Anita, like you gave me instructions.

Vaneetha: Yeah, I mean, it's my podcast. It starts with me. So let me tell you about my story. My story starts, actually similarly to Shalini's. We were born in India to Christian parents, and when I was three months old, I contracted polio. Now, polio is a disease that's transmitted through water.

The vaccine had been developed a decade earlier, and so nobody really knew what it was. I was three months old though, and in India they often give the vaccine at six months, so the doctors had never seen it though, so they thought that I had typhoid and gave me cortisone to reduce my temperature, which was 105 for three month old.

That's [00:02:00] very dangerous. they found out within a few days that I didn't have polio. I was a quadriplegic. I couldn't move my arms and my legs, and they told, our parents that they needed to leave India just for me to get good medical

care. So we moved to England. I had my first surgery in England when I was two.

Then we moved to Canada after that. And lived there for the, in Montreal and Toronto because of, our dad's job. I lived in the hospital though, so I was in and out of the hospital for most of our time in Canada, or at least our time in Montreal. I lived in a Shriner's hospital, which is a free hospital.

And only saw my parents on weekends and didn't actually even see you Shalini for a year. There were nine months when I was in a body cast, so I just grew up with this weird life. Like I loved our family. I loved being home on some level, but I was bullied a lot. Did not talk about it because it felt really shameful

I felt like something was wrong with me. I was [00:03:00] embarrassed to tell you or our parents, so they didn't really know any of that. But the hospital was really lonely because I saw them on weekends, but I didn't feel different in the hospital. Everybody was different. So there was this. Hating the hospital, hating, being alone, hating all the weird parts of the hospital, but then really having a hard time being home and feeling like I don't fit into this world.

Grew up angry at God, but you know, we grew up in a Christian family, went to church every Sunday, so I knew the right stuff, I knew all the answers, but I didn't really have any relationship with God. And as a side note, Shalini was like writing scripture verse on all the letters to our grandparents, and I was like, okay, I can't do that.

So she was like, I was the black sheep, just so you guys know. and was pretty angry. I feel like I, of all the people who bore the brunt of my anger, it would be Shalini because I was nice to everybody, but her. I was pretty cruel to her. [00:04:00] so then when I went to high school, I got involved in FCA, Fellowship of Christian athletes.

And I love to say it's not because I was an athlete or a Christian, I like to fellowship with the athletes. So I did. And a friend of mine and I would sit in the back and we would talk about boys. We did not take the God stuff seriously at all. But she went away on a retreat and she came back and said, God is real.

And that was terrifying to me. Didn't wanna talk about God, but I ended up just praying and asking God to show me if he was real and was in my questioning. I actually was saying, God, why did this happen? If you're good, why? Why? Why did this happen? Not expecting an answer, but I opened the Bible One I

had been confirmed it, in our church, that I had never opened and flipped open to lots of verses that didn't make a lot of sense to me.

But then finally flipped open to John nine where Jesus is talking to the disciples and they say, They pass a blind man and the disciples say, who sinned? This man or his parents? [00:05:00] That he was born blind. And Jesus says It was not that this man sinned or his parents, but that the work of God would be displayed in his life. And that was the moment for me when God jumped off the page of scripture and was speaking to me. God was answering my question. But it was interesting 'cause my question was a why question? Why did this happen? And I felt like, what had I done? Like why did you do this to me? And I think that's a lot of our why questions.

And God's why answer had nothing to do with what had I done or what had this man done. It was what was God gonna do? What was the purpose? And so that really turned on my head, just what God does in our suffering and just knelt down by the side of my bed and committed my life to Christ. Knowing that God cares about our questions and God personally answers us.

So I honestly thought after that life was gonna be great. I was sure that we [00:06:00] all have one big suffering. And I still remember looking at people thinking, you have no idea when this stuff is coming on you, because my stuff has already happened and my life is gonna be great. And it was great for a long time.

It was really great, and then it wasn't. And we'll talk about some of these things, throughout, today, but. My, my ex-husband, had an affair early on in our marriage and that was just a really hard time. Dave, yeah, we were, I was, Six months pregnant. Seven months pregnant when I found out. And just a really tough year.

But I learned to start talking to God 'cause I, there was nobody to talk to. And then really right on the heels of that, I had an infant son who had a heart problem. His name was Paul, and he had surgery at birth. We thought he was doing really well. But then suddenly an a substitute doctor took. His medicine saying that Paul didn't need it.

He didn't really understand Paul's condition. Paul had a hypoplastic left heart [00:07:00] and he took him off his medicine. Within a few days he died. And that was the time for me where I really questioned God because I felt like the other suffering had happened before I knew God, and I felt like I've committed my life to God.

I've suffered. How could God do this? And I first spoke at Paul's funeral saying, God never makes a mistake. And I really believed that. And you were there, Shal. I really felt that. But then months later, I wanted to pull all of those words back, or even weeks later, because I had been teaching Bible study, I had been in a public place in our church, and I didn't know how to grieve.

I didn't know how to be honest with God. I felt like I had these plastic answers and they were not helping me. So I pulled away from God and. It was really one day in the car where I cried out to God and just begged God to change me and to help me and to draw near to me. And God did, and the presence of God filled my car in a way that I cannot describe [00:08:00] to this day, but it really grounded my faith in the fact that God will be with us in our suffering no matter what. So, went through that and realized that no matter what God would be with me. And I'm really thankful that God gave me that sense because six years after Paul died, was diagnosed with post polio syndrome and. You were there with me through that diagnosis, and for people listening who don't know what that is, it is a condition that happens 30 to 40 years after the onset of polio.

And what happens is people discover that their body starts going backwards, and they've found out that when you get polio, and this is the way they describe it, your primary motor neurons die. Which is why I had, I was a quadriplegic. But through 21 operations as well as a lot of exercising, my body start to started to rejuvenate.

But they found out that these secondary motor neurons have a limited life. And so the more you [00:09:00] do, the weaker you get, you have them, and they gave us the analogy that it was like money in a bank and everything you do makes a withdrawal. That was shocking to learn. you were with me as they told me that, and I didn't even know how to process it, honestly. But after I did, which was, quite a journey that maybe we'll talk about, I really sensed that God was with me and again, thought, okay, I've had it all. I've had all the suffering. And yet, six years later, Dave, came home and told me he was leaving for someone else. And my world turned upside down.

I was parenting two adolescent daughters. They were, 10 and 13 at the time, and our lives fell apart. anger spilled out over everyone everywhere. my, one of my daughters was very compliant before that and she. She really exploded, in anger and grief and it was so hard. I was homeschooling them at the time, which anybody out there who's [00:10:00] homeschooling, I consider you the saints of the world.

I homeschooled for a few years and I would say it was the longest. it seems like the longest 10 years of my life, even though it was only four years. My daughters would probably say the same thing. but it was hard. And I, yet, I learned to lean into God through that and felt really desperate through a lot of those times.

And yet I found that God was not only good, he was better than I imagined as I leaned into him. And, so Dave and I eventually divorced. he remarried and, and. Eventually remarried as well. I married an amazing man named Joel, and I love his name because Joel 2:25 says, I will restore the years the locust has eaten, and in God, God has restored so much of what was taken from me in Joel.

So I'm so thankful for that. Anyway, that's my story. Shalini please tell us some of your story as well.

Shalini: Well, that was gripping, so I was enjoying it even though I have [00:11:00] lived so much of that story with you. And so I have the flip side of Vaneetha's story of while she was in hospital in Montreal. suffering agonies. I was home and our parents were fun. Are fun and lovely and home seemed delightful and full of light.

And I just remember the agonies of sorrow that Vaneetha had to suffer. That felt unbearable to me. You know, there's part of this story that at Shriner's Hospital is for the poor, and our family wasn't poor, but really good doctors surgeons volunteer there. And so this was the access to care. But a lot of those families don't visit their kids.

And, smaller children aren't allowed on the ward. So I had to sit in the waiting room because my parents, while [00:12:00] they weren't poor, they couldn't afford a babysitter for me for all day or for however many hours that was. so I had to sit in the waiting room and my contribution to life was to not need anything.

To not want anything. The, and my parents were heartbroken that they couldn't see Vaneetha. So I could make life better by saying I liked staying in the waiting room. I could lighten their load when there was nothing else I could do. By saying, I don't need anything. I'm happy. This is what's best for me, and I feel no lack. Because the burden of pain was overwhelming.

And somehow in my own mind, that became my value in the kingdom. My purpose in the kingdom was to help other people and not need anything. And be grateful and always [00:13:00] happy. And I love the Lord. Like I really, I

remember just opening the Bible and loving God, loving everything I saw. but he needed me to not need anything.

Not want anything. And that was okay. It's so where's the distortion on my side of it? So, went to college, met my husband, in college. He did a PhD in Toronto. He's a theologian, and a brilliant man. So just. Our life has been serving God, serving the church. We were in Toronto when, we did a workshop on evangelism and we had a speaker.

And that speaker said, if you aren't spending time alone with God every day just for you, you don't need to worry about evangelism. you can't [00:14:00] introduce people to someone you don't know. And that hit me really hard because I had been... I love God and I studied the word to teach it, to... It was always for someone else.

Or if I did a devotional, it was a check the box. But I really struggled with what to do with time alone with God. People talked about having that time alone with God, but all I felt was guilt and shame because it felt like the most boring thing in the world and pointless. Whereas if I was serving and teaching, that felt like it had a purpose.

And time alone with God was like, what the heck is that? So after he said that, it just pierced to the heart. So I set this, and for me it was a big ask. 15 minutes every day at the same time, and it was gonna be five minutes for reading the Bible, [00:15:00] five minutes for journaling, and five minutes for prayer.

And I had a little Canadian Bible Society, it's a lectionary so daily readings and you'd probably get through the Bible in 10 years I thought. But that was what I could handle. And Vaneetha that, at the time, I remember what amazing quiet times you would have. And I would just feel like,

i, I don't even know what that is. So I'm sitting there and I remember starting re because it's a lectionary, so I'm not picking which verses I wanna read. And I'm reading things I've never read before and I don't even know what they mean. I remember journaling. And, I've studied scripture enough.

I knew the arc of scripture. it wasn't like I was coming cold to it, and my husband had said, you have studied for so many years. You know so much. Don't keep relying on your commentaries, on your thises. I really [00:16:00] encourage you to let the word speak to you directly.

Vaneetha: Not because commentaries are a bad thing, but they had become my crutch.

Shalini: So I would read things and I would go and I remember reading, I've been young, I've been old, but I've never seen the righteous forsaken. And I remember going, apparently you haven't, but I have I all the time, and I'm not that old. I dunno what you mean. This is, taking a Psalm and going, or any chapter going, I don't like this.

I don't know why this is in the Bible. I don't know what I'm supposed to get out of it, but here I am.

Vaneetha: I love that.

Shalini: And I remember praying and going, like I was through my prayers in a minute and a half and going, okay, I have three and a half minutes left. what am I supposed to say? You're God, you're gonna do what you're doing.

I've gotta be good. [00:17:00] So I limp through this for months and then suddenly I am reading about Jacob and Esau. So familiar. And I see Jacob stealing, taking the blessing that belonged to Esau and I hear Esau saying, father, is there no blessing left for me. And suddenly I see myself as Jacob, the manipulator. That I arrange my life so I can fulfill my purpose by rescuing people.

And by standing bet... what I saw was I stood between them and God. And I thought that's what I needed to do to help. Like not draw people's attention to the Lord, but that I would rescue them because then I had a value. So I was devastated by this and devastated in a way nobody could understand. [00:18:00] I am Jacob the manipulator, I kept saying. And people would go, no, you're the nicest person I know, And I would be like, cause I'm a manipulator..

Of course I'm the nicest person, you know. I wanna be your savior. Of course you'd think I'm nice. What else would you think? And people would be thinking, there's maybe a med for that, or maybe a therapist. Like they didn't know how to engage. So it felt lonely. I couldn't read scripture.

I wanted to throw up. It felt like what I had done, and this is the truth, what I had done, I could not undo. I had always had this mental frame of, totally made up, but when I do something bad, I fix it.

Vaneetha: Mm

Shalini: When I sin, I don't just repent, I make it better. Jesus doesn't really need to die like that was the past.

Right. Now we're gonna stay clear

Vaneetha: Hmm.

Shalini: these are things [00:19:00] I cannot undo. I couldn't even explain to people what I had done. They didn't even understand. And so the horror of that, and then the, it was the next Sunday, so this happened on a Monday and I spent the week not being able to sleep, wanting to throw up.

I'm in my early thirties at this point too. and then Sunday, I think, okay, I can read the lectionary again. I can do that.

Vaneetha: Hmm.

Shalini: And I was kneeling by the side of my bed. I was that scared to pick up scripture. And this is, Jacob encountering Esau again. I'm terrified. I wanna throw up, I don't remember how this story ends.

I, I'm in it and essentially Jacob's like gathering all his stuff together, goods to appease Esau in case he's wants to kill stuff. Um, livestock servants and servants. You tell Esau this stuff [00:20:00] is for him. And at the back of the, this procession is gonna be Jacob's least favorite wives. Like the, it's just, you see what Jacob values in the way he's ordered things so that Esau won't destroy the most important things at the beginning.

And Esau looks at everything and goes, what is this stuff? You're my brother and I love you.

I heard the words of God.

You have tried so much to make yourself right with me to appease what you think is my anger. You're my daughter and I love you. What is this stuff you've gathered up in front of me and that changed everything. And instead of feeling that I had watched through li my life as like kind of a savior, I became this sinful [00:21:00] woman weeping at the feet of Jesus, unable to believe how much I had been forgiven.

Vaneetha: Hmm.

Shalini: And so that, that changed my life. And that was just before Dave's first affair. I'm just realizing the timeline, finding out about that. So I have three kids. we ended up moving to Grand Rapids. My husband, was teaching historical and philosophical theology at seminary here. and he's had some complicated health issues.

So he's had to take early retirement. My kids are all over the place and love them dearly.

Vaneetha: That's great. That's wonderful.

Shalini: But I have a question for you that, because you said I got to ask you questions

Vaneetha: Yes, you do. Nice ones, hopefully.

Shalini: you know, When we grew up, we were well trained in gratitude.

My, our parents are [00:22:00] so good at being thankful for what the good the Lord has done and in our family, like the deadliest sin was entitlement. Like are, you're not entitled to anything. Receive everything with gratitude. And somehow that teaching on gratitude in my own mind, I took what we had been. And I saw it as you can never lament, lament is the worst thing ever.

Because look at how much you have to be grateful for. And in my life looking at Vaneetha, look at what you have to be grateful for. And I so remember our parents saying to you, Vaneetha, you're brilliant, you're beautiful. what more do you want? you're fine. You hair rocks.. It's fine. look at what you have.

I don't feel sorry for, and it was such a great thing. It was, we're not gonna pity you. Nobody [00:23:00] pitties you, you have so much. So that was great. But how do you lament, I was so struck after Dave left you, I was helping you in your, you had this walk-in prayer closet. And you had this journal, if I can call it that, and it was this messy tear stained watercolor book.

and you said, this is where I pour out to God. And it was like, like someone had poured black, like it was the most horrifying art I've seen. And I was like, oh my word. You get to say that to God and that's your quiet time like that. how did you find permission to move from gratitude or even the hardness of saying, God, where have [00:24:00] you been?

God, this is where I am and I'm gonna say it to you.

Vaneetha: Mm-hmm.

Shalini: How did you make that move? I've always wondered.

Vaneetha: Yeah, well, you know, it just as you mentioned, it was a process cause I think growing up and just being a pleaser, it just feels like counting your blessings is the way to go. And I think people talk about that. I've kept a gratitude journal, but sometimes it feels like you're just putting a bandaid on something by just making yourself be thankful when you don't feel thankful.

And I, I do see there's something good about seeing what you're thankful for, but there's something really good about saying what you are struggling with. And I feel like, before Paul died, I don't think I understood what Lament was, and so, and maybe because I hadn't been through something so devastating, but after Paul died, I didn't have a lot of thankful words and so I didn't have a lot of words for [00:25:00] God.

Honestly, I felt like. You know this, if you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all. And so that was how I felt towards God. Like I don't have a lot of good words, so maybe I shouldn't say anything. And that is the opposite of what God wants. I think I learned that God is a, it's a relationship with somebody.

And so if I'm upset, like what is gonna draw me near in a relationship, even with my husband, is to tell him rather than to give him the cold shoulder. And I think I didn't understand. That I was giving God the cold shoulder by saying the right stuff, but my heart being completely far from God. So it was after Paul died that it started me just realizing I've gotta go to God and that's the only way I'm gonna find healing.

And that happened, after the Polio clinic, but a lot after Dave left and I was a single parent and. Really, my life was the hardest it's ever been, and I didn't have good words, but I wanted to connect with God. And so I started just with where I [00:26:00] was and all the pain and just spilling that out, really modeling the Psalms because we see David spills it out and God turns him around.

He doesn't have to manufacture that. And we see that in Job and Jeremiah. Like they just spill out their raw pain. And I don't think I had ever really focused on that before. I had read them as removed and I loved your way you interacted with scripture and seeing Jacob, like when you see yourself in scripture, it changes you.

And I feel like I put myself in the place of Job and Jeremiah and David and really felt what they felt. And so that brought around this shift for me and made me love lament because I found that. It's hard to be that honest with God sometimes, but when you get there, it changes everything because God really, you look through a lens that is very different [00:27:00] when God is, when you're being honest with God. But I know that lament has been a big thing for you too, and we've talked about this, but I'd love to for you to share just your experience with Lament and where God has brought you in that.

Shalini: and it's so in 2019, early in 2019. there's my husband's health issues and there are people I, beloved people in my life, suffering. Some in ways that I know are temporary, some in ways that are unbearable to me. there are things that I cannot fix and do not know how anybody could ever fix them, and they are truly unbearable.

And I realized I was dealing with them, or the Lord pointed out, by actually putting Jesus stickers over my eyes like, the Lord is good. It will always be good. Everything works for a [00:28:00] purpose. And I was using those verses to avoid looking, and hardwired to me like, don't look at what you can't bear.

Um, because then you'll fall into the abyss.

Vaneetha: And so the word of the Lord came to me, hope is not resignation with a Jesus sticker on it. And I want you to hold what you cannot bear.

hmm.

Shalini: And that felt like, sorta graphically, it felt like he was asking me to hold thorns and close my hands over them. And just feel pain that I couldn't carry, fix, save.

And I did not know what hope was, if hope was not resignation with the Jesus sticker on it. So

Vaneetha: Hmm.[00:29:00]

Shalini: I walked this journey with the Lord of, I'm gonna hold the sorrow, and name it and not run from it. And I'm gonna hold on to the fact that hope is different than what I think it is.

and that summer I realized that I thought that I had been a more.

I made more space for other people because I had not been grieving my own sorrows, and I realized that I had actually let my heart become a hoarder's house full of my ungrieved losses.

Vaneetha: Hmm.

Shalini: So there actually was no room for anybody else 'cause my house was stuffed with my ungrieved loss. So, suddenly I had more room for the sorrows of others.

And then Vaneetha, you wrote the first draft of your memoir. [00:30:00] And in your memoir you really walked through your process of crying out to the Lord. Like I'd seen it in that, I'm gonna call it the Scream Journal. at that point it felt like, yeah, that's what you can say if you've got post polio, your son has died and your husband left.

But I had not applied it to my own sorrow, and so I started journaling these journals that I had to write on the front of... if I drop dead suddenly, and you find this, please burn it. I don't want you to remember me this way, it, I didn't even believe I was allowed to say these things.

Vaneetha: Mm

Shalini: And what I discovered at the end in this process is that when I had been looking away from the suffering, I had been looking away from God because he was present in the suffering. And I had not just been closing my eyes to pain, I had been [00:31:00] closing my eyes to Him.

Vaneetha: mm.

Shalini: And so I love the title of your book because I feel people are desperate for hope and we don't even know what it is. And we don't know how to get there 'cause all of us, or I don't know if all of us, some of us, have really felt that if I want hope, open your Bible and let the Lord give you hope and that just feels like a shut up and get over it.

I've got this. You have no standing, you don't count back in the waiting room. You make the world a better place if you don't need anything. Here's another promise. Hold that.

And so tell me about your study. I'm so excited about it.

Vaneetha: I am, I'm really excited too. And actually it was really fun cause we got to work on, some of it together. But the study, is centered around six questions that we ask God. The first [00:32:00] one is if God loves me, why did this happen? And that was my first question to God is if you're real, if you care, why did this happen?

And I think a lot of us enter into suffering with that question or with some question, and there's questions like, what if the worst happens? Or what if this never gets better? Why did God let me suffer? And so a lot of why, what, how do I walk through this? And I wrote it because I think the most honest Christian life does begin with questions.

And I think we squelch them sometimes with as your words, sort of a Jesus sticker. We shouldn't ask questions. God is good. Let's just trust that and certainly there may be people whose faith really is that, I think. Maybe it was John Calvin who said, you know, I just don't ask God questions.

And there are, I think there are people that have that kind of faith, but I don't, so I ask, and I find that actually has produced faith in me because asking questions is radically trusting God. It's [00:33:00] saying, wow, I worship a God who cares enough to answer my questions. It's funny. As I was telling my story at the very beginning of this podcast, I realized that's how I came to faith was asking God a hard question and realizing God answers and God doesn't always answer exactly like that was pretty incredible.

So sometimes we don't search the scriptures and find the exact answer, but at the same time, there is an answer in the fuller counsel of God and the answer is God, Himself. And that's what Job found out at the end is, he threw tons of questions and God did not actually condemn him for all of his words, but God basically said at the end, Hey, I'm the one that created the universe.

And in seeing who God was, like understanding God Himself, Job didn't have any more questions. And so I think that's what happens to us. We lean into God with our questions. We wanna [00:34:00] listen, and then God answers with himself, his presence, and that's what changes us. And so that is the main reason I wrote this Bible study, is I don't want people to feel like, wow, I've gotta get it all together in suffering and then come to God. Come to God with your questions. And there's women in the Bible. It's six women, who've asked similar questions to each one of these and how did they find an answer and how did God meet them in that? There's place for journaling your own questions. I share parts of my journal.

So some of the things, Shalini that we talked about that you saw that you were like, did you really say that to God? And I was a little hesitant to actually put that out in this Bible study because I ask God a lot of questions. And so I put parts of my journal in that in a Christmas letter that I write.

And so we start with a narrative. I share my story, and then there's a lot of what does the Bible promise us? What are the things we can cling to, what is the lens we need to look through this with? And so we go into that a [00:35:00] lot of New Testament scripture, in the Bible study. And then finish each week, let's look back and see what are, how have we met God?

And, one thing that I have done every week is say, pay attention. How is God meeting you? And we've talked about this before, that sometimes we don't sense the presence of God unless we're looking for it. Like we, we know that God is with us through scripture. But when we open the Bible and ask God to show us who he is, it comes alive.

And when we're going through our day, and if we prayed and realized, wow, God answered that prayer, when we're paying attention, we see God's faithfulness. We see God's presence. And so I really encourage readers to do that, to make their faith their own. Because I feel like for me, when my faith hinged on the faith of other people, and I had these Bible verses memorized, but they had no meaning to me. My faith felt pretty wooden. But when those Bible verses became the things I said [00:36:00] back to God and the anchors I clung to, that is what transformed my faith. And that's my prayer in the Bible study, is that people will cling to God in the midst of their questions and feel free to ask 'em. So that's, Yeah, that has been an amazing part for me in writing this Bible study.

And I thought a lot about you, Shalini, when I was writing it. 'Cause one of the chapters is a lot about, struggling with needing to be cared for as well as what is it like to be a caregiver. And I know that is a big part of your story as we've talked about, which I know is hard, and I would love for you to just talk about, how that caring for me and being a caregiver in, in other contexts has affected your identity.

What have your struggles been with it and what would you advise somebody who is caring for someone right now? How would you say this is a good way to intersect them?

Shalini: Yeah, well, you know from my story that. I let caregiver become my badge of honor. [00:37:00] Like I'm the person who cares for people. I'm the

person who rescues people. And I was in a, small group that was just exploring what does spiritual formation mean? What does it mean to bring ourselves fully to God? And it had started just before, Dave left.

And after Dave left, there was a day, a weekend, a week I think I came to visit you and I came back horrified at how weak you were, how angry your daughters were at their life, being upended. How sad and heartbroken and alone everybody felt. And there was nothing I could do. Nothing at all. And I came back to this small group and we were just sitting with the text, come onto me, all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.

And I just burst into tears and I said, it's a [00:38:00] lie. His yoke is not easy and His burden is not light. That's just a flat out lie. So obviously I got over the whole, don't say anything bad.

Um, all these women, such mature beloved sisters in Christ, like of course come around me and ask me to talk to them. And one of them who doesn't even remember saying this to me, said to me, Shalini, you need to resign as your sister's savior. She already has a savior. And that just broke me. I came home and I had it out with God.

It's Lord, you know why I think I need to be beneath a savior? It's because you have been such a lousy Savior. How could you make her so weak? How could you make her so weak? And again, this doesn't always happen, but I felt the tender arm of God around [00:39:00] me saying, oh honey, she's not weak. You are blind.

I made her the strongest woman on the planet. She depends on me for every breath she takes, and she will stand before the gates of hell and declare that I am enough. One day we're gonna sit with the angels and we're gonna laugh that you thought I made her weak. This is a privilege that you get to be here and watch this, but she's not weak.

You are blind. And that affected how I walked with you Vaneetha too. I was not your rescuer. I was not your savior. I was pointing you to the God I knew was there, [00:40:00] in this and at that time it's so crazy. It felt like you were gonna shout out to the world from the gates of hell that God himself was enough.

And I'm crying 'cause I'm just thinking about all the writing you hadn't written word one. And as far as I knew, you had no interest in writing

Vaneetha: Right.

Shalini: except for the Scream journal.

Vaneetha: Yes, exactly.

Shalini: And very funny letters. But that whole, I am nobody's savior. I am not standing in the place of God. And I am child of God as well. That He is tending to me and I matter. And maybe in this case, in the caregiving, I have a front row seat to what God is doing and it's really [00:41:00] easy as a someone in a role where you feel like the caregiver is to have a sense of pride.

I don't need the, there's the needy and the people who have something and it's oh, honey, no. None of us has anything. I have only what God has given me and only what he has given me in this moment. And you are welcome to anything I have, but I have nothing that I was not given and I can't give you what I don't have.

Vaneetha: Mm.

Shalini: So I hope that answered your question as I've started crying and

Vaneetha: Yeah, me too. So we weren't supposed to cry, but we are here. We are crying.

Shalini: here we are. Here we

Vaneetha: Yeah. I, one of the things I so appreciated about you Shalani, is you helped me laugh and I even just on this podcast, even though we've we're crying, we've also laughed a lot. And I think that has been one of the hallmarks of our relationship and...

[00:42:00] One of the ways that I have been able to survive. And you just mentioned a little bit of it, so I write a Christmas letter every year, and that has been, a throw everybody under the bus, figuratively. But we, if you walk into my house and you say something maybe that you didn't mean to say and you say it the wrong way, know that it will be in the Christmas letter.

But I have found, especially through suffering, trying to find ways to laugh and to laugh at yourself and the difficult situations, even just taking a step back. It's been super healing for me and I feel like you have helped me lean into that as we talk about it. And one of the things I do is, people listening to this, maybe you're in suffering and it's I don't laugh.

I actually would watch standup comedy sometimes, like I would watch Tim Hawkins. I'm actually going to see Nate Bargatze, um, in a couple days. And I just love watching people who can see life in a slightly different way and make me laugh. And [00:43:00] that's one thing, in the Bible study even.

I have parts of this Christmas letter that are crazy, look at our lives and. I have felt that laughter is a really important thing in suffering and I don't know. What are your thoughts on laughter Shalini?

Shalini: Yes, I totally agree. And, we have a family that loves to laugh and gets great joy and delight in laughing. And I would add to that, that as much as I love to laugh, I had not known how to delight.

Vaneetha: Mm.

Shalini: And to delight in the Lord. So I had thought that my love of laughter, which was the delight and joy in other people.

And in finding quirky, interesting things, and it's such a gift to delight in that. But delighting in the Lord has been this revolutionary thing for me. 'cause I knew about [00:44:00] gratitude, I knew about laughter. I had to learn about lament, deeply about lament. And then to come back to delighting myself in the Lord and realizing the Lord delights in me.

Vaneetha: Hmm.

Shalini: Thinking about how we delight in children or pets or just small, helpless creatures who depend on us, and we just delight in their very being and seeing God delighting in me as I am, as I was made...

Because back to even that waiting room, I am not the kind of person who could actually easily sit in a waiting room. But I thought I made myself valuable by being what I am not. And in front of the Lord to delight in who I am, has been a huge thing and it's taken me a long time. And [00:45:00] thinking about Sabbath practice, resting in the Lord.

I had, I took several years of every Sabbath setting aside some hours to delight in the Lord. And what I would do is did that delight me at the end of that? no, I am not delighted. I will not do that again. Am I refreshed and I'm, am I restored? Is there more love? Am I showing evidence of having been in the presence of God with delight?

Vaneetha: Mm

Shalini: And it's crazy to be my age and to spend years figuring out am I delighted?

Vaneetha: mm.

Shalini: I don't know. let me try it. And I'm delighted in the most odd things that nobody... Like got a set of colored pencils. My husband, delightfully gave me like 150 colors or something. And I took a book and I colored a little square for each color, which of course you could [00:46:00] get this on the internet printed off right away or with this set of print pencils and calligraphy, the name of the color, it gave me joy.

It, it has no purpose. It is useless. I love it. I love doing it. And it doesn't have to mean anything, but I can go, God, I love the colors you make, and I love that I have this pretty pen and I love how I wrote Sunset Rose, or whatever I wrote wow, I, I don't let myself geek out over just me being me.

Vaneetha: Hmm.

Shalini: I made a playlist "cooking and dancing". Like I dance while I cook.

And I'm not a great dancer, so people who have joined me like get great laugh, like we're circling back to laughter. Just laugh. Except the way I dance while I'm cooking, but I'm just happy.

Vaneetha: Oh yeah.

Shalini: And we can laugh together. [00:47:00] And so finding that in the sweetness and goodness of the Lord, that I am the one Jesus loves. I am beloved.

I'm not just an auxiliary to whatever other big purpose He has. Where, you know, like a drone, like a worker bee.

Vaneetha: I mean, I love that idea of just delighting in the presence of God, 'cause I think that is how we feel heaven on earth really. Is, 'cause heaven is the unending presence of God and face-to-face. And now, we see in a mirror dimly. But just the fact that we can delight in God's presence and it just makes me so excited thinking, what is that gonna be like in heaven?

Like how much more delight like, how filled our hearts would be. And I actually think that delight, Shalini is the key to making it through suffering. Is to finding delight in God. 'cause we can't find delight in our [00:48:00] circumstances in the midst of darkness. You know when our life feels so heavy. But there is this way that we can look at our lives, through this lens of God's presence.

And so see His presence in everything that we do. And. I found that the Bible actually is the best way to do that. To get up and, I loved your 15 minutes of, read the Bible, five minutes, journal, five minutes, pray five minutes. And that may end up being an hour for people who are listening or it may be 15 minutes. But I would encourage everybody to start that practice however long or short it is because.

I think we've both found the most delight in our lives through the word. And I wouldn't say I always was like that. I don't think anybody was always like that. You were always like that more than me. But we'll talk about that later. but I actually pray sometimes when I read it and I'm not getting anything out of it. I just say open my eyes, Lord, [00:49:00] to wondrous things in your law, which is Psalm 119:18. And I actually even, I just thought of this. I have this acronym in the Bible study, which I do pray, which is WORD and one is Waken my ear to listen. O is: open my eyes to see wonderous things in your law. R is: reveal my sin and your ways. And D is: Direct my heart to your love and to worship.

Because I think when we read scripture, ultimately, we want to know God's love through that and to worship God and God to show us our sin. And I feel like when I just stop and ask, because sometimes I think, oh, I can understand the Bible. I can read a commentary as you mentioned, or I can understand this myself, but the Bible is a spiritual book.

And God is the only one who can help us really understand it. We can dissect it, but we can't understand it and apply it without the spirit of God. And that's what's changed me and just would love to hear from you. Just, we just have a couple more minutes left, but How is [00:50:00] love to hear more about the role of scripture in your life today?

Shalini: Yeah, and I would say right now, as things have come up and it seems like it's more than I could bear or do or hold. I spend... my time in the word with the Lord is just the thing that holds me together. And I would now say I feel like I delight in scripture and it's like falling into the most amazing river stream that is taking me around the world.

And showing me the planet and creation in ways I would nev... And I think I told you once, I feel like I'm belly crawling through scripture. Like I want every drop. I don't wanna miss anything. And even in funny things like saying, okay, Lord, I'm gonna read every place name, I'm gonna read every name [00:51:00] and know that in every name there was a story I don't know.

Vaneetha: Mm.

Shalini: And every one of these is a story. honoring, you know, that you put here for me to see, but you alluded, you talked about it. God is the creator of the universe. we were made by Him. For Him. We have the privilege of entering into that as beloved daughter. And to think, I am the beloved daughter of the creator of the universe. And sit with that as my first place I sit in the morning

Vaneetha: Mm.

Shalini: And I have a geeky scientific mind, only randomly, but even quantum mechanics, quantum phy, like we have no idea of the vastness. We don't know what we're looking at. but I am the beloved daughter of the creator of the universe. [00:52:00] And I can start there.

Vaneetha: Ah, I

Shalini: And so there's both worship and who God is, but who I am.

Vaneetha: Yeah. Shalini and I actually have just spent hours just talking about our quiet times before and just wow, God showed me this. And that is actually the richest part of our relationship, which even though we've been through so much, we. Grew up together.

You probably have bad memories from that, but I have good memories. Anyway. But that has been such a joy for us is just sharing with each other how God has delighted us. So that's been wonderful. So we're near the end of the time, so I'm just gonna ask you the question that I love to ask everybody on the podcast.

Which is, what is one practical way you found hope when you felt most desperate for it?

Shalini: Sitting in the presence of the Lord, remembering that He is, the creator of the universe. And I actually, because I'm a little ADD, I sit with a candle 'cause I [00:53:00] need to have something to look at or I will go off after a

shiny object. And just picture myself sitting beside the Lord. And I picture Him, I just, I'm just leaning on His knee.

I'm like, you are the creator of the universe and I have the right to sit here with you. And that's all. That's everything.

Vaneetha: I trust you. I have no idea what I'm looking at, but I trust You.

I love that. And I would say for me in terms of, finding hope, something so similar, just sitting with God. I have a candle as well. and just sitting with God and just reading the Bible and often the silence that follows, like silence is a discipline. But I have found that I am often so busy talking to God that I don't listen.

And [00:54:00] so this discipline that I have, sometimes I wish I could say I did it all the time, every day, but after reading scripture to just sit with God and sort of speak the words, "speak Lord your servant is listening". And letting God sort of his word, whatever it is, wash over me has been such a healing thing.

And so that has given me hope, when I have felt desperate in my own life. And, just encountering God in different ways is... He is the source of hope. It's not a wishful thinking hope. It is a sturdy hope that will carry us from today, through eternity. So, it was so wonderful having you on this podcast, Shalini.

Thank you so much for being here.

Shalini: Thank you.