

Do Not Weary in doing good or succumb to Compassion Fatigue Galatians 10:1-10

Have you looked at the newspaper or watched the evening news lately. If you have then chances are you've heard and seen the news of millions of refugees displaced in our world who have fled persecution or violence. Global problems like this coupled with continuing wars, conflicts, global terrorism, floods, earthquakes, famines, homelessness and poverty seem so great and the solutions so inadequate that those who are helping on the front lines and those of us who are watching from a distance may suffer from what's called "compassion fatigue."

It could be so easy to give in and quit when there seems to be no end to the needs of others and our efforts appear to make little or no difference. Compassion fatigue has the ability to poison our attitude in any such situation—at home, on the job, at church, in school or community. The Bible's antidote is found in Galatians 6:9-10, "Let us not become [grow] weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up [lose heart]. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers [fellow Christians in the church including refugees and the persecuted]."

If you are feeling like throwing in the towel today, I say to you- Do NOT give up doing good succumbing to compassion Fatigue. God promises, as spoken of by Paul in this scripture, that the good seeds you sow and the good deeds you do will yield results in God's time...**7 Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. 8 Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.**

The great hindrance to good sowing is weariness that results in discouragement and eventually in giving up. Four months lapse between planting and harvest. While it is true that spiritual results may occasionally come sooner, more often they take much longer. The best reason for resisting weariness and giving up, is knowing and believing that when the necessary preparation is done, the harvest is certain. You can't help but feel that Paul may be talking to himself

here as he thinks of the extensive but mainly unrewarding efforts expended on the Galatian churches. But he wants us to know that by faith we are to keep up our good work.

Someone once wrote on this subject

*Be not weary in your serving;
Do your best for those in need;
Kindnesses will be rewarded
By the Lord, who prompts the deed. —Anon.*

So, as images of human suffering, tragedy and loss have filled daily our television screens for months and years on end now, there has been an outpouring of prayer and financial donations to aid the victims, including struggling and persecuted Christians, those in need both here locally as well as globally. Undoubtedly, the financial donations for recent disasters and social needs were in part responses to the strong and widespread news coverage these events received. However, media attention has a double-edged sword.

With our 24-hour instant news channels, social media and email reporting on various natural disasters, celebrities crusading against world poverty, and the appeals for funds and images of suffering coming at us from nonprofit, relief and Christian Charitable organisations, we can't seem to avoid stories of human misery. And though we need to be aware of what is happening, sometimes it feels like too much, and we are tempted to shut down. We suffer from overexposure, and overexposure is the prelude to compassion fatigue.

Compassion fatigue is the gradual lessening of compassion over time, usually due to a growing feeling that all the effort being expended is pointless. It is God's merciful gift of Compassion that spurs us to get involved: to pray for the victims, donate money, to get involved locally to serve and minister in order to help the needy. But compassion fatigue sets in when we work and give ... but begin to wonder why things don't seem to be getting better. Eventually we can become callous and desensitized, no longer willing to hear another sad story or a charity's pitch for money. The strange thing is, it is those who have the enormous capacity for feeling and expressing empathy, who tend to be more at risk of stress related to compassion.

Our best hope for dealing with compassion fatigue is to remember that God is our source. If we try to cope with all of the frustration and disappointment in our own strength and power, we are probably bound to fail and become discouragement's very next victim. We each need to experience God's heart and God's strength if we are to avoid compassion fatigue and burnout.

If we are plugged into our own power supply, we are sure to experience compassion fatigue. We need to get plugged into God, the eternal source of wisdom, strength, joy, perspective, and compassion. Without Him to strengthen us, we cannot hope to keep ourselves focused and fueled to help others. We too quickly fall back on self-absorption, that desire we have for comfort and the demand for short-term solutions. But God can help us take the spotlight off ourselves, offer us the courage to sacrifice, and give us a more patient and eternal perspective on problems.

Becoming callous to calamity is an understandable defense mechanism... because we don't have the emotional bandwidth to treat each new violent act or natural disaster, war or tragedy as new. Our thinking can become, "Oh, it is just another famine in Africa" So, in this day of twenty-four-hour news coverage, as we are bombarded all through the day with bad news from anywhere in the world, it's easier to tune it out, to shrug our shoulders and withdraw emotionally from the culture.

Here's where our biblical worldview sets us apart from the world. Today's secular worldview is actually cohesive and consistent in that it views life through the prism of the self. Whereby, my ultimate value is whatever makes me happy. Dwelling on the sufferings of others doesn't seem to help them and it only saddens me. This era of constant access to the world has actually accomplished the opposite—it's made us less attentive to the world. If the news doesn't make me happy, I can turn it off or tune out.

By contrast, the Christian worldview is cohesive and consistent in that it views life through the prism of the other. In the sense of "it's not about me." We are commanded by Paul in our scripture today to "carry or bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2). The assumption behind Paul's command is this: We

all have burdens and God does not mean us to carry them alone. It is true that Jesus Christ alone can bear the burden of our guilt and sin; He bore it in his own body when he died on the cross. But this is not so with our other burdens—our worries, temptations, doubts and sorrows. We can certainly cast these burdens on the lord as well. But remember that one of the ways in which he bears these burdens of ours is through human friendship and compassion for one another. Loving God and loving our neighbor are intertwined (Matthew 22:37–39). Jesus identifies himself with those in need: what we do for them—we do for him! (Matthew 25:40)

If we value people in pain and difficult circumstances as Jesus does, we can never be callous to their suffering. Every victim of violence—and every perpetrator—is someone for whom Jesus died (Romans 5:8). The answer to compassion fatigue is not less compassion—it's the power of the Spirit. The first "fruit of the Spirit" is "love" as written of by Paul in the previous chapter of Galatians 5:22. The ability to care for those in crisis and need comes ultimately from Christ.

The spirit indwells all Christians, but 'Spiritual Christians' are 'led by the Spirit' and 'walk by the Spirit' so that the fruit of the Spirit appears in their lives. The practical example of Christian spirituality is the bearing of one another's burdens.

So... Beware of Compassion Fatigue

A woman called a friend and asked how she was feeling. "Terrible," came the reply. "My head's splitting and my back and legs are killing me. The house is a mess, and the kids are driving me crazy."

Full of compassion the lady making the call said, "Listen, go and lie down, I'll come over right away and cook lunch for you, clean up the house, and take care of the children while you get some rest. By the way, how is Sam?" "Sam? I have no one named Sam."

"My heavens," the woman exclaimed, "I must have dialed the wrong number." The other lady cried out into the phone, "wait, wait you're still coming over aren't you?"

We have all probably felt like this overwhelmed lady at times haven't we? Unwell, tired and weary. Some of us though may be feeling more perhaps like the woman who dialed the wrong number and is now aware of yet another person's great burden and desperate need.

Whichever you are listen to this illustration: A mother of a newborn baby, as tired, worn out or fatigued as she is and becomes after many nights of broken sleep, with all the pressures of an existing family that has grown by one more, this mother remains attentive to the cry of her baby and its individual needs. In spite of her weariness, she does not under normal circumstance ever 'not care' and respond to the needs of the child, for her resolve is to love and show compassion to her child. It remains, even grows as the number of children in the family grows, and sleep lessens, for a few years.

That mother is a picture of God and his love for all his children and it is a picture of our Christian life and faith in that we too are not to become weary in doing good when a new circumstance or matter arises in our lives. But we do need to wise in who, how and when we help by considering our own situation because physical, mental-emotional burnout and spiritual fatigue can lead to burnout in any life. If you're responsible for caring for infirmed family members and friends, you might be a candidate for compassion fatigue and burnout if you are not careful. Some people give and give and serve and serve, and they wake up one morning and they realize they have lost the joy of serving. They're tired. Jesus is our model for serving others. The writer of Hebrews invites us to, "Consider him [Jesus] who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart." (Hebrews 12:3) It doesn't say Jesus enjoyed opposition: He endured it. There is the real possibility that Christian workers can grow weary and lose heart. Jesus sure became weary and required times of solitude prayer, sleep, and rest to catch up because he'd given out so much. That's why we need to keep our eyes on Jesus, and depend upon the power of the Holy Spirit to serve, along with the wisdom of God to know who, when and how to enduringly serve while caring for our own physical, mental-emotional and spirit needs at the same time.

Let us pray:

O God – Renew my compassion daily for the things that break your heart. Let me not become weary in doing Good, for at the proper time I know I will reap a harvest if I do not give up. Thank you for your love and power. Come into my life by the power of your spirit, fill me today with your energy, wisdom, and discernment so that I might do good to all people, and not succumb to Compassion Fatigue. Amen