

Dear Friends,

We can all read and view stories of terrible suffering in the media, on a daily basis. Sometimes it feels that we are bombarded with tales of tragedy. A new phenomenon has been studied called compassion fatigue. This is a condition to which people working in caring roles are most prone, but I think it is something that can affect us all in different ways.

In a way compassion fatigue is akin to when a person working in heavy manual labour finds that their hands become calloused and insensitive to delicate touch. Compassion fatigue is not a physical condition but a condition of the heart and soul. The clinical symptoms are well documented, but in its common milder form I think that it is evidenced when people begin to blame the sufferers, belittle the suffering, or insist that they too are victims. Ironically, compassion fatigue is often a result of failing to care for ourselves, or not living a balanced life. True empathy involves entering into the sufferings of others. This is necessarily a costly option. As followers of Christ we have the ultimate role model. In Isaiah 53 we read, *'Surely He took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows'* (v.4). When a person must carry a heavy load, it makes all the difference if someone will help by taking the other end.

I was deeply moved recently by a tragic newspaper story. The story was of a family in Oregon comprised of husband, wife, wife's mother, 13-year-old son and a rather large dog. They awoke one morning to find a wildfire approaching their house. They received no warning to evacuate the property, so dad went to the town to hire a trailer to save their most prized possessions. On his return things were much worse. In order to get to his family, he decided to drive into the fire. In the smoke he encountered a woman who he did not recognise. When they spoke, she said, "I am your wife". She had walked for three miles through the fire to get help. Sadly, it was later discovered that her mother and their son had both perished alongside the dog.

That story, because it was so specific to one particular family, made a deep impression on me when I read it. The account brought home to me that no matter how wealthy or privileged a society is, tragedy can strike. Importantly, it reminded me that when we hear statistics concerning world tragedies each number represents a real person.

I love the story of the man who was walking along a beach upon which many starfish had been washed up. Every few steps he bent over, picked up a starfish and tossed it into the sea. A passer-by called out, "You can't save them all!". He replied, "No, but I can save this one". With that he bent down, picked up another starfish and lobbed it back into the safety of the sea. The truth is we cannot do everything, but if we all do something, then together we can do a lot. The words of an old gospel song by Albert Osborn has always inspired me. Below is the chorus and 2 of the verses for your reflection.

God bless you,

Keith

Keith C. Beckingham, Superintendent minister.

**The Saviour of men (Except I am moved) – SASB 527**

The Saviour of *all* came to seek and to save  
The souls who were lost to the good;  
His Spirit was moved for the world which he loved  
With the boundless compassion of God.  
And still there are fields where the labourers are few,  
And still there are souls without bread,  
And still eyes that weep where the darkness is deep,  
And still straying sheep to be led.

*Chorus*

*Except I am moved with compassion,  
How dwelleth thy Spirit in me?  
In word and in deed  
Burning love is my need;  
I know I can find it in thee.*

It is not with might to establish the right,  
Nor yet with the wise to give rest;  
The mind cannot show what the heart longs to know  
Nor comfort a people distressed.  
O Saviour of men, touch my spirit again,  
And grant that thy servant may be  
Intense every day, as I labour and pray,  
Both instant and constant for thee.