

Compassion Fatigue

GALATIANS 6:9

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This morning I'd like for us to look at another question that came in a while back. This one is unsigned, so I'm not sure whether it is from one of us or from one of our guests, and so if this is yours, I do not know whether you are here this morning! But, that is okay, because it's a question that might apply to many of us, and perhaps to all of us at some point or another. The question is: Why do we grow weary in well doing? There wasn't a scripture reference with this one, but the wording might be familiar to us because of a passage in Galatians 6, so I would invite you to be turning with me to Galatians 6, and we will get there together in just a moment.

As I started looking into this question, the danger of growing weary in well doing, a phrase started coming to mind, something known as "compassion fatigue." Perhaps some of you have heard of compassion fatigue. I'm a bit familiar with it, but I looked it up to learn more. Miriam Webster gives the first definition from the medical community – compassion fatigue, "the physical and mental exhaustion and emotional withdrawal experienced by those who care for sick or traumatized people over an extended period of time." We understand this, don't we? We might think of a therapist, or maybe an E.R. doctor, the same would probably go for paramedics, and police officers, and other first responders – all day, every day, they deal with unspeakable trauma, and it has a way of taking a toll. It has a way of wearing a person down – "compassion fatigue."

But it might happen to all of us, in a sense. Here's a secondary definition – compassion fatigue, "apathy or indifference toward the suffering of others as the result of overexposure to tragic news stories and images and the subsequent appeals for assistance." Again, most of us can at least understand this. We are constantly surrounded by people needing us to do something. Terrible things are happening all around us, "Help! Help! Help!" Tornadoes, floods, hurricanes, acts of terrorism – people always needing help. And after a while, it's tempting to turn it off, to become numb to those appeals, to get tired of always caring about everything. Or maybe we are caring for a sick relative, or we're trying to get somebody through a difficult situation. Compassion fatigue has been described as the "cost of caring." As we do good, we pay a price, and sometimes we get tired. And so, this is what came to my mind when I saw this question, "Why do we grow weary in well doing?" It is a good question, a valid concern, especially when it comes to our faith. As we do good, we get tired. Sometimes we don't see any positive results. We give and give and help and help, and the people we're helping still have issues! What difference are we making?

So, as we look at this frustration, I want us to focus in on one verse in the book of Galatians – Galatians 6:9. Usually we try to look at a larger section, so to give just a bit of background, let's remember that Galatians was written by the apostle Paul to the churches in the Roman province of Galatia, in what is now the nation of Turkey. As you might remember, Galatians is perhaps one of the first New Testament books to be written. In other words, if we were to arrange the 27 books of the New Testament in chronological order, Galatians would perhaps be at the very beginning, before Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. And the reason is: As Paul is preaching and going out on these missionary journeys, he writes to some of these people. Most scholars would date Galatians somewhere between 46 and 50 AD, so only about 20 years after the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, only 20 years or so after the church is established in Jerusalem. In the first part of the book, Paul deals with the struggle people were having between the Law of Moses and the New Covenant. And then, in the last two chapters, Paul basically just encourages Godly living: This is how you actually live the Christian life. And remember: This comes years before anybody had a gospel account. So, in some of the first actual scripture to be written under the New Covenant, we come to Galatians 6:9, where Paul says,

Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary.

As we keep our thoughts focused on these words for the next few minutes, I want us to look 1.) at the good we need to be doing, 2.) the question: why we might get weary in doing the good that we do, and then 3.) the promise God gives to those who do not lose heart.

I. But first, let us please notice the fact that we as Christians actually need to be DOING GOOD.

As Christians, we are not just BELIEVERS, but we are also DO-ERS. We do things. We do good things. James is the other book among the very first to be written, and we remember how James says that we are to, ***“...prove [y]ourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.”*** We are to hear, and we are to do. We do what the word tells us to do. Over and over again, the Bible emphasizes doing. In Acts 10:38, as Peter tried to explain Jesus to Cornelius and his family, he said, ***“You know...how He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.”*** In other words, Peter started with what he knew that Cornelius already knew. Everybody knew that Jesus ***“went about doing good.”*** Jesus did good.

In the same way, let's not miss the fact that ***“doing good”*** is the main point of Galatians 6:9. Not thinking about doing good, not saying that we're doing good, not feeling good, but ***“doing good.”*** And in context, as we look at the surrounding verses, notice some of the good we are called to do. In the previous chapter (in Galatians 5:22-23), we have the ***“fruit of the Spirit,”*** as Paul describes ***“love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.”*** These are good things that we do. And then in chapter 6, we have the command to restore those who have been caught up in sin (in verse 1). Restoring the falling is a good thing we do. In verse 2, we have the command to bear one another's burdens. This is a good thing we do. In verse 6, we have the command to those of us who are taught the word of God to share all good things with the one who teaches. This is a good thing we do. And then, in the verse right after this one (in verse 10), we have the command, ***“So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.”*** This is another good thing we do. We look for opportunities. We do what we can. We do good first to those who are in the church, and then we move out from there. We do whatever it is that needs to be done: we listen, we teach, we help a brother move, we prepare a meal, we cover rent, we fill a tank with gas, we give a ride – whatever it is, we actively look for opportunities to do good.

Just a side note: There's no real emphasis on people being deserving of the good that we do. Yes, we start with those in the church, but as Paul says in verse 10, we ***"do good to all people,"*** just as Jesus did. Jesus ate with sinners. Jesus healed, many times, with no regard for whether someone believed. We follow his example.

I should also mention, though, that Galatians is addressed to the ***"churches of Galatia."*** This is a letter to Christians. This is a letter to congregations of the Lord's people. We help in Jesus' name. We use the good that we do as an opportunity to teach; again, just as Jesus did. This reminds us to be somewhat strategic with the good that we do. I don't want to be helping others through a man-made religious group. When I do good, I want to also do good spiritually if at all possible. We had an article on the Salvation Army in our bulletin a few weeks ago. The issue is not that the ultimate recipients are unworthy in some way. That's not it at all. I've told you before about giving our Thanksgiving turkey to an exotic dancer. We got the call, I had a good talk with the woman, but when I learned what she did for a living, I let my wife handle that one! I let her do the drop-off! My point is: The issue is not in the worthiness of the ones we help, but the issue comes in giving to a man-made religious group who will then turn around and use my funds to convince somebody not to be saved. My ***"good"*** has then become a physical blessing but a spiritual curse. Years ago, we met a woman who was helped by the Salvation Army, we studied together, and when we came to the subject of baptism, she broke down in tears, sobbing on her couch, and she said, "Those people never mentioned baptism to me." They had convinced her to think she was saved without baptism. Once she saw the importance of it, though, we baptized her immediately. In our family, then, instead of giving through some kind of man-made religious group that's out there teaching error, we would much rather do good directly, or through a congregation teaching the truth. Or to put it another way: If I have \$100 that I want to use to help somebody, I would much rather take somebody to the grocery store to get what they need (helping them face-to-face), or I would rather entrust it to the elders of this congregation to use it for somebody they know who needs help, as opposed to giving it to some other religious group who will take their cut and then teach who knows what in the process.

But the first big idea this morning is that we as God's people are to ***"do good."*** When we do good, those on the outside will see our love and will hopefully come to a better understanding of why we are the way that we are and why we do the good that we do.

II. There is a second big idea in Galatians 6:9, and it comes in the form of a warning – there is a danger here, and the DANGER is that as we do good, we might be tempted to LOSE HEART DUE TO WEARINESS.

And so we have a danger to be avoided. Someone has said that the one of the greatest enemies of enthusiasm is time. We start doing something, and we get tired, we lose interest, maybe we forget why we started doing it in the first place. When I was a kid, I used to collect sugar packets from restaurants. They used to come with little drawings of boats and stuff, and I thought I needed to have one of each. That lasted for a few weeks, and then I didn't care anymore! All of us have gone through phases where we get excited about something, and then it fades. The same thing happens as we ***"do good."*** We teach a Bible class for a while, and maybe after a while we realize, "This is hard. This takes a lot of preparation." And maybe the initial excitement fades. Or maybe we help somebody with food, or a meal, or a tank of gas, and over time we realize, "This will never end." And we get discouraged or we lose interest.

In Galatians 6:9, when Paul refers to ***"losing heart,"*** he uses a word that refers to relaxing or letting go. I think of holding a toddler. Kids seem to get heavier when they let go. I'm not sure how that is physically possible, but you know how it is: A kid falls asleep in your arms, and they seem to get heavier! They have let go. The word

was used in the ancient world with reference to unstringing a bow. The hunter is out there in the woods ready to go, ready to take aim and hunt, but over time, nothing comes, so he unstrings the bow and he goes home. The same thing can happen spiritually. At one time, we were holding on, but then we let go. That's the idea here. We are doing good, we have a firm grip on helping or doing, but then we relax, we let go. We give and help and sacrifice, but the person we're helping doesn't seem thankful at all. That gets old, and so we let go. We are helping a loved one through a difficult time – a financial crisis, an addiction, a mental health meltdown of some kind, a health concern – and over time, it's hard, and so we get tired, and eventually we let go. We suffer "compassion fatigue." We share the gospel, but the person we are teaching never changes; nothing happens, and so we relax, we give up. Doing good is hard work, hard work makes us tired, we don't see immediate results, and so we lose heart, we get discouraged. Or maybe we feel that we've been taken advantage of – we drop off a desperately needed bag of groceries, and when we walk in the apartment, we see the 60" Samsung with the X-box that we can't even afford in our own family. Or we sacrifice to help, and then we find that the person we're helping just bought a brand new car. What in the world! Or we work hard and sacrifice to help somebody out of a financial crisis, and we realize that it is truly a bottomless pit. We realize that no matter what we do, this will always be a problem. Yes, I've dropped off a casserole, but this woman is still sick. I've provided a boxed side dish, but these kids still don't have families. No matter what I do, I cannot fix the actual problem. So many circumstances might cause us to get tired and disillusioned, even to the point where we just let go. As I see it, this is how Satan tempts those who have been Christians the longest – they aren't tempted by the worship of idols, they might not be tempted to steal or commit adultery, but they are tempted to just let go. Compassion fatigue. They grow weary and unstring the bow.

So, this is the danger, that we let go. For this reason, the Bible encourages us over and over again, to hold on, to hang in there. We have it here, and we have a number of these in the book of Hebrews. In Hebrews 3:6, we are told that we are the house of God, ***"...if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end."*** In Hebrews 3:14, we are told that we are ***"...partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end."*** In Hebrews 4:14, we are told that since Jesus is our high priest, we must ***"hold fast our confession."*** In Hebrews 6:11, we are told to show diligence, ***"...so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end."*** And in Hebrews 10:23, we have the encouragement, ***"Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful."*** So, going back to Galatians 6:9, we are given the mission of DOING GOOD, but we are also warned about the DANGER OF LOSING HEART due to WEARINESS.

III. As we go back to Galatians 6:9, we come to the end, and we find **THE PROMISE OF A REWARD**, and the reward is that we will **REAP IN DUE TIME**.

If we do not lose heart, there is a harvest coming, but there is a delay between the sowing and the reaping. Of all people who know something about waiting, farmers are probably somewhere near the top of that list! Farmers understand the long pause between planting and harvesting. Nobody plants an apple tree expecting to bake an apple pie the very next day. On Thanksgiving, we had the most awesome pear stuffing, made with pears from a tree we planted almost 20 years ago, one of the first trees we planted. It was so good! Crops take time; sometimes a lot of time. Fruit trees might take years to bear fruit. Other crops might take anywhere from a few weeks to a few months, but there's always a wait. It even has it right there on the seed package! We get most of our seed from Jung's in Fitchburg, down near Verona Road and Highway PD. Yesterday, I went out in the garage and found a few of the free seed packs I didn't have space to plant this year. This is lettuce, one of the quickest to go from planting to harvest, and it says right here on the front, "30 DAYS." Thirty days from planting until your first salad! No sooner! And in a sense, no later! Lettuce is funny like that. It has a pretty narrow window. But the point is: There is a wait involved. We understand this. We can't really rush gardening. We work

the soil, and plant, and water, and pull weeds, but other than that, gardening is basically a matter of waiting. And that's the picture Paul paints for us here. Just as a farmer plants and then waits, so also we as God's people do good, and then we wait patiently for results. The harvest is coming, but it might take a while, and in the meantime, we are not to give up. We must not unstring the bow. We cannot let go.

This is so different from the way most of us live these days. We want stuff to happen quickly. I think there have been times when I have not even actually stopped in the Chick-fil-A Drive thru. I slow down enough to give my order, I tell them my name is Moses, they greet me by name as we quickly swap money for food, and the whole thing takes less than a minute. And now we come to expect it. We'll order Toppers down by our house, they tell us it'll be 12 minutes, we run out the door, and it's ready by the time we get there. I don't even know how that's possible. I ordered pictures through the Walgreens app a week or so ago, and before I could set down my phone, I got a message telling me to come down and pick them up. We aren't used to waiting these days, but God reminds us here that when we do good, we need to hang in there, because there is indeed a wait between the good that we do and the time when we are rewarded. And if we forget this, it is so easy to lose heart.

We think of James' reminder in our scripture reading this morning, ***"Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains. You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near"*** (James 4:7-8). Or maybe we think of the words of one of those anonymous Psalms, Psalm 126:5-6, ***"Those who sow in tears shall reap with joyful shouting. He who goes to and fro weeping, carrying his bag of seed, shall indeed come again with a shout of joy, bringing his sheaves with him."*** There is a delay between the work and the reward. There is a delay between the planting and the harvest.

This goes for just about anything good we might do – teaching a Bible class, cleaning this building, blowing snow, getting the livestream out there, or even the work we do with the clothing give-away. As I was working on this lesson yesterday afternoon, we got a call on the church line from somebody wanting to say "thank you" for a bathmat and some towels he got from the give-away back in August! He obviously has a developmental disability of some kind and was calling from a group home. But he wanted us to be praying that he would make some good choices while interacting with the staff and his fellow residents at the home he's in right now. He's having some issues and needed somebody to be praying about it, he saw that bathmat and thought to call us. I remember talking to this young man back in August and giving him my number. At the end of the call yesterday, he asked if we had a Bible he could have. So, we'll be making that happen, probably later today. But what a reminder! Sometimes, the good that we do has some good consequences way off in the distant future. I can hardly remember August! Maybe we remember sorting clothing, and hauling boxes, and being worried about the weather, but the good we did back then is still bearing fruit.

But the point here is: To reap the harvest, we cannot lose heart, but we need to remember the promised reward. There is a delay between planting and the harvest, and we cannot get discouraged to the point of letting go in the meantime.

Conclusion:

As we close, the question is: What kind of seeds are we planting right now? What good are we doing that guarantees a spiritual harvest at some point in the future? Are we doing good in our families? With our children? Are we truly doing good with our spouse? Are we sowing spiritual seeds in the community? With our friends

and neighbors? Are we doing the kind of good that leads people to God and to his church? Are we sowing seeds of spiritual growth and unity within the congregation?

We don't really have a choice as to whether God's law of sowing and reaping applies to us. It does. Backing up to verse 7, Paul says, ***"Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life."*** The seeds we plant will bear fruit. That's not up to us. What is up to us is the kind of seed we choose to plant. The choices we make today have long-term consequences – with our families, with our co-workers, in this community, and here in the congregation. Are these choices leading to corruption, or are these choices leading to eternal life?

If you are not yet a Christian, we are inviting you to make a choice this morning, the choice to accept the word of God and obey it. We allow his word to go to work in our hearts, and then we go out and share it with others. We first obey his word by making a decision to believe in Jesus as the Son of God, we then turn away from sin, and we allow ourselves to be immersed in water for the forgiveness of sins. We are baptized into the death of God's Son, and he adds us to his kingdom, the church. If you have any questions, get in touch, but if you are ready to obey the gospel right now, you can let us know as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

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