

## The Christian and “Compassion Fatigue”

Thanks to the Door County Advocate, recently we have been able to read more about the aftermath of Katrina and Rita, the hurricanes that devastated so much of America’s coast along the Gulf of Mexico. Immediately after Katrina, hearts went out to the victims of the storm as semi-trailers filled up and wallets emptied out. But now, after the tsunami in the Indian Ocean and the earthquake in Pakistan and the mudslide in the Philippines and the storms in the South, I wonder if many are getting weary of hearing about the needs of people a thousand miles (or more) away and if “compassion fatigue” has set in and we would just rather tune it all out.

I hope all those who call themselves Christians will not tune it all out, but rather take to heart the example of their Lord, who had a heart for the poor and the needy and the suffering. I hope all who consider themselves followers of Jesus Christ will hear and remember the word of the Lord: ***Love your neighbor as yourself.***

The easy thing to do is skip the stories that speak of suffering, whether it’s in Pakistan or Pascagoula. A comfortable thing to do is keep your checkbook closed when the appeal comes from Samaritan’s Purse or World Relief or some other worthy organization. The common thing to do is look for the good deal on the next new toy that will get crammed in your storage shed and ignore the fact that there are hundreds of thousands of people around the world who do not have much more than a storage shed to live in. Besides the calamities of earthquake, hurricane, and tidal wave, there are the everyday disasters of disease and extreme poverty that take the lives of multiple thousands every week. I know it’s a tired expression, but “What WOULD Jesus do?” We cannot always know for sure what Jesus would do, since he was in the habit of surprising very many people by what he did. But it’s safe to say he would not take the easy, comfortable, common route. And he calls his followers to walk that same path.

I cannot say what you should do in light of the suffering around the world. I am not sure what I should do. But I am sure most of us are not supposed to look back to Labor Day weekend and figure the 8-roll pack of toilet paper and the case of water we contributed for the semi-trailer fulfills the command to love our neighbor as we love ourselves.

I hope we do not fall prey to “compassion fatigue” and I pray we do not take the safe and easy, clean and comfortable path. That’s not the path Jesus walked. And we read in Luke 9:23 that Jesus said to all, ***“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”*** Jesus says, “Follow me. Trust me. Obey me.” The way of obedience is the pathway to blessing. If we obey the Lord and love our neighbors as an outgrowth of our trust in God, we will encourage others. And God will bless us. I can’t say what the blessing from God will look like to you, or what it will be in your life. But the Bible teaches that God rewards those who put their hope in him instead of their money or their abilities. I invite you to take a risk in the name of Jesus Christ for the sake of others. It could mean you give away a pretty sizable sum of money. It might mean you spend vacation time working in the hot and humid Gulf Coast, or volunteering in a refugee camp in Africa, or visiting orphans in Cebu.

I wonder what would happen as Christians take to heart the apostle Paul’s words: ***As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.***

(1 Timothy 6:17-19)

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Bible verses are from Holy Bible, English Standard Version (ESV).

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