

from the October 16, 2009 edition -
<http://www.csmonitor.com/2009/1016/p18s01-hfcs.html>

Combating compassion fatigue in times of crisis

A Christian Science perspective.

By Beverly Goldsmith

Devastating bush fires, dust storms, floods, prolonged drought, storms, and cyclones. Lately, Australians have witnessed disaster after disaster. Every day seems to have brought a new catastrophe. Recently a tsunami hit neighboring Samoa, and hours later an earthquake struck the Indonesian island of Sumatra. The need for humanitarian aid is urgent, and Australians are again being asked to donate generously.

A spokesman for UNICEF Australia, Martin Thomas, said that now was the critical time to raise funds. However, he fears there is a danger of "[compassion fatigue](#)" setting in. As a result, he's worried that the financial support charities require to provide needed assistance will not be forthcoming from a disaster-weary public.

His concern about people feeling care-wearied is well founded. So many instances of death and destruction seen on the TV news can produce a kind of emotional numbness. Even scenes of people in distress can, over time, become desensitizing. They cease to invoke the desire to reach out and help.

So what can be done to combat compassion fatigue and motivate individuals to pray and also give humanitarian assistance in times of crisis? For me the answer lies in the love that God has for us.

The Scriptures say and show that God is Love. He is the tender, compassionate, all-loving One. He cares deeply for His sons and daughters, and He shows His caring in ways that meet each person's need. God gives His love generously, unconditionally. It is abundant, dependable, constant. He

stands ready to assist us every moment, and He never fails to respond to every call for help. I know this to be true from personal experience. Over the years I have been in life-threatening situations, exposed to contagious disease, in need of a home, and I have lost loved ones. Yet, because of God's great love, I have been comforted, sheltered, and kept safe from harm.

My experience is not unique. The love that is God, and the love that He has for each of us, is present right here and now to comfort, shelter, and protect survivors wherever they live in the world. No one is left out. The love of God is vast and encompassing enough to include everyone's needs – despite the size and scale of what is required. No matter how overwhelming the scene is, no circumstance is beyond the power and grace of God. To God, all things are possible – all good is possible – and each of us has a role to play in seeing this happen.

God needs us to express His love – to care about the well-being of each other, to pray and to do what is needed to provide everyone with food, water, clothing, and shelter. The good thing is that we can do this. Out of His great love, God, according to Scripture, made man in the image of Himself – the image of Love. This means that as God is kindhearted, so we are kindhearted. As God is all-caring, we, the men and women of His making, are caring toward one another. It is therefore quite natural for us not only to feel God's love, but to express His love to others. Each of us has the sustained capacity to be generous, considerate, selfless, and giving.

It is possible to stop compassion fatigue from setting in by drawing on the love of God and letting it energize our caring. God's love is inexhaustible. He never tires of caring for us. His love remains strong and active always. Because God's compassion is never blunted, neither can our compassion become deadened in the face of disaster – no matter how many times aid is required. God is the divine motivator. He constantly inspires the generosity of His children. He gives us the ability to love and keep loving, to give and keep giving. It's His prompting that enables us to take action and help one another now and always.