



Greater Joy
Part 5 – Overcoming Compassion Fatigue
Travis Brawner

Good morning. Two things we don't lack around here: creativity and bloopers. For the record, Kami said shoot when she broke the ornament. Just in case that wasn't clear. Welcome this morning; good to see you all here in the Castle, the Gathering Place. Also, if you're joining us outside, welcome to you on a cold, wet morning. And a special welcome as we are streaming to those of you sitting in a deer stand. We're glad you've chosen to worship with us this morning. We are in the Ozarks where the only thing to keep people home from church more than a pandemic is deer season. So, we'll see you next week.

My name is Travis Brawner. I'm part of the teaching team and one of the elders here at Woodland Hills. We take an offering every week. Things have changed a little bit over the last year or so. We have different ways of giving. If you desire to write a paper check, we still have offering boxes in the back of the foyer and at the Gathering Place. The Church Center App is highly useful and a great resource for us. You can give through it. You can give online at woodhills.org or a new method that we have is text to give where you can simply text a dollar amount to 84321. We are extremely grateful for the generosity of this church and all of you, and encourage you to continue in your generosity in this season. Again, we say thank you.

You received something as you came in the door this morning. This has a few things in it. First of all is a *Christmas in the Courtyard* invitation for December 1. That's a week from this coming Wednesday. We invite you and your family to come along and enjoy kicking off the Christmas season with us. There is also a calendar of events for December because December is always a busy month and so there is a nice calendar in there to tidy all of those activities up for you. And then a gift of a cookie cutter. So, make some cookies and bring some for me. I like cookies.

This morning, we're continuing in our *Greater Joy* series as we're working through the Book of Philippians and talking about how Paul expressed greater joy and how we can experience greater joy.

Before we jump into that, I want to wish you a happy November 21. If you're like, *what's that?* Well for my wife and I, it's the now 29th anniversary of our first date. I have a picture of that occasion. You're thinking he is a child, and she looks the same still. I took her to a high school football playoff game and then of course to Silver Dollar City. I bought her a gas station hot dog for lunch and then we took a picture in an upright coffin. I know what you're thinking. *He's been a romantic from the start.* And that's right. I know how to treat a lady... who was born and raised in Branson. She liked every bit of it and now here we are, 23 years of marriage later, with four kids. So, it worked out and I'm going to say it

was the hot dog that sealed the deal. She liked hot dogs, so... That has nothing to do with what we're talking about this morning. I just wanted to show a picture of my wife and how she looks the same.

This morning, the title of the message we're continuing in Philippians is called *Overcoming Compassion Fatigue*. I get a little bit nervous when we have a message of this type. It's kind of like when an article comes out that says, "The Dangers of Overexercising," and the couch potatoes rejoice. It's like, "See, honey, I told you exercise is bad for you." No, exercise is good for you. Overexercising is bad for you. Compassion is a good thing. Compassion fatigue is a bad thing. So, that's what we want to focus on this morning.

First, we're going to talk about compassion before we can get to compassion fatigue. We're going to jump in with Romans 12: 15, which says this, and we reference this a lot from the front here at Woodland Hills. ***Rejoice with those who rejoice, mourn with those who mourn.*** It is a normal part of the Christian experience to see someone struggling and to have sorrow for them. We mourn with those who mourn. Sometimes we experience what we would call sympathy where we see someone struggling and you could say, "I feel sorry for them." But mourning with those who mourn is more than that. It's what we would call empathy, which is "I feel that with you." "I mourn with you; I can feel that sorrow with you."

So, sympathy is "I feel sorry for you." Empathy and mourning with someone is "I feel that with you." Compassion goes one step further. Compassion is feeling sorrow for someone and desiring to do something about it. So, we feel compassion and there is this urge inside of us to do something about what we are feeling in the sorrow with someone else. Sympathy is "I feel sorry for you." Empathy is "I feel sorrow with you." Compassion is "I desire to do something about that for you and with you."

So, we're going to jump into Philippians 2: 19 and finish off Chapter 2 today. Philippians is a letter that Paul wrote to the church at Philippi. It is considered his joy letter, where he expresses joy and he shows us with examples how we can experience greater joy.

Philippians 2: ***19 I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. 20 I have no one else like him, who will show genuine concern for your welfare.*** I want you to underline *genuine concern* if you have your Bible or click the bookmark on your app. It's very important, because you can spot false concern, can't you? It's like someone is helping you in your misfortunes and it may seem like they have your interests in mind, but, clearly, it can be otherwise. It's icky, right? The false concern that someone may have.

21 For everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. 22 But you know that Timothy has proved himself... Underline that. ...because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel. Timothy has proven worth. What does that mean? In his compassion, his genuine concern and compassion, he had proven worth. It wasn't a single act. He had shown it over and over from many acts of kindness and goodness. That means that just like exercise, five minutes every six months doesn't cut it. Giving the panhandler a dollar and moving on doesn't cut it as far as our compassion is concerned.

That doesn't mean we have fulfilled our compassion requirement as followers of Jesus. You see, he had proven worth which means it was a lifestyle for him. It was a character trait and a lifestyle. It was the way he lived. So, Timothy had genuine concern and proven worth.

23 I hope, therefore, to send him as soon as I see how things go with me. 24 And I am confident in the Lord that I myself will come soon. Paul wanted to send Timothy because of his genuine concern and his proven worth. What we can learn from that is when we have genuine concern and proven worth, the Lord can use us in ministry. That's why Paul wanted to send him, not someone else that may have their own interests in mind, but Timothy, who had proven worth. I want to be someone that the Lord can send, that has genuine concern and proven worth that my compassion is real.

Now, for the follower of Jesus, this should somewhat come naturally. When I say naturally, I don't mean naturally as in the flesh, but naturally as followers who have the Holy Spirit in us. We should understand that kindness and goodness should naturally flow from the follower of Jesus. If you have Jesus Christ, you have the Holy Spirit and if you have the Holy Spirit, kindness and goodness are there, just looking for a way to get out. You may say, "That concerns me a little bit because I follow Christ, I'm a believer, I've placed faith in Christ, and frankly sometimes I'm just not feeling it. I don't have that in me. I don't see people experiencing sorrow and have a drive to do something about it."

A couple of weeks ago, Scott, in speaking about humility, talked to us about a video he had seen of a three-year-old that was trying really hard to turn four. You can't grit your teeth and make it happen with humility or compassion. What's the answer? The answer is if you're not feeling it, don't fake, first of all. Second, draw near to God. Don't fake it. Remember, you can spot false concern. People know what false concern is. Don't fake it. Draw near to God. Draw near to the author and perfecter of our faith, Jesus Christ, the source of compassion. The one that, as you draw near to him, you can't help but feel compassion for those who are struggling in their misfortune. Kindness should flow naturally. But if you're not feeling it, don't fake it. Draw near to God.

We all have times of higher compassion and, sometimes, of lower compassion, and it can tend to fluctuate from one person to the next. I've had plenty of times of low compassion where I can see someone struggling and I think I should probably be a little more empathetic about that, but I'm just not feeling it. And there have been other times where I have had really high levels of compassion.

I want to share with you a time where compassion, frankly, hit me like a truck. It was when I was doing my residency training in Oklahoma City. I was consulted to help take care of this little girl on the pediatric cancer ward. I remember walking into that room and the picture that I saw was this little girl who was gaunt and wasted away. She had no hair on her head and her eyebrows were gone. I think it hit me especially because her parents, one on each side of her bed, were sitting there. The look in their eyes that they gave me as I walked into that room was a look of despair and hopelessness. We had a three-year-old and a newborn at home at the time and I think that's especially why it hit me. I felt compassion like I had never felt before and I don't think I've felt since. I want to fix this. I feel sorrow. I feel this with you. And I want to fix it. I want to snap my fingers; I want to wave a wand; I want to do whatever I can to fix all of this. What was paralyzing to me is I couldn't. There was nothing I could do to fix this problem to just make it all go away.

So, I took care of what I was there to take care of and I left. As I was walking out, before I even got to the door of the room, I was choking up and crying. By the time I got to the hallway out of the unit, I was weeping. I just lost control. I'm standing at this rail, overlooking the balcony on the third level of the Children's Hospital there in Oklahoma City, overlooking the foyer. I remember it like it was yesterday. I was just thinking, *this is unbearable. I can't handle this level of sorrow and this level of compassion the Lord placed on my heart that day for that situation.* And that's good. The Lord wants that from us. I finally snapped to and realized that this is first thing in the morning and there are a lot of things I still have to do today. There are a lot of people that still need me. I have to move on and help take care of things. I realized that if I couldn't keep this in check, I was eventually going to suffer from what we're talking about today – compassion fatigue – where emotionally, physically, and relationally you just get worn down because of the compassion that you feel meeting the needs of others and tending to people and their misfortunes.

25 But I (Paul) think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus... He's introducing a new person to us here. **...my brother, co-worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs.** Do you see how many things that Epaphroditus is to Paul and if to Paul, no doubt to the church at Philippi because we see that he is the messenger from the church at Philippi. They had sent him to Paul to minister to him and to update him on how the church was doing. Look at all of those things. Today, we would say Epaphroditus wore a lot of hats. He was doing a lot of things. He was tending to a lot of needs.

We understand that we, as a church, can do this sometimes with some people. Someone who is willing and able, we can just keep throwing hats their way, right? Before you know it, someone gets these hats piled on, these things that they are tending to.

26 For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill. And he was ill, and we're going to talk about that here in just a little bit. First, I want to focus in on all of these things that Epaphroditus was to Paul and to the church at Philippi. This is why it's important for us to bear with one another the challenges of the church, the struggles of the church, the struggles of one another. Sometimes we can tend to pile it on to one or two or a few people that will tend to take it on.

There is personal responsibility here too, I believe. Because the person that gets things piled on is the only one that knows their capacity. You are the only one that knows your calendar, your schedule, your time, your emotional capacity, your relational capacity, what you have going on at home. If you are able to meet the needs that someone is trying to ask you for help with, and if this is you that tends to take on all these things, you need to understand something. If you haven't heard this, you need to hear it. You can't be all things to all people all of the time.

We have to understand that and that's a hard one to swallow if you're the kind of person that loves to help people, loves to take on things, loves to see a misfortune and fix the problem. Otherwise, if you do, you'll find yourself bending to the urges of compassion with every misfortune that you see. And before you know it, you're a virtual walking hat rack, taking on all the needs of everyone around you. There are a lot of misfortunes around that need things, need help, need addressing, need concern and care all around us, things like domestic abuse, childhood hunger, protecting the unborn, homelessness, the

mental disabled, the physical disabled, mental illness, sex trafficking, drug and alcohol addicted. There are a lot of needs around us. That's a short list, frankly. We could go on and on about so many needs that are out there. The thing we have to be careful about, if you're one that tends to take things on, is it could start piling on and on. The thing you need to understand too is that it's normal for different people to have different levels of compassion about different things. It is normal for different people to have different levels of compassion about different things.

There is no single person that can take on everything, every misfortune that's out there. And frankly, there is not single local church that can take on every single misfortune that's out there. That's why it's wonderful to be a part of the body of Christ where there are others that have compassion about different things than you do. And if you don't know where your compassion wheelhouse is, draw near to God. He'll tell you where your compassion should be and what he's calling you to. You see, we're called to care about all people, but no single person can care for the misfortunes of all people. We have to accept that. It's a hard one. The Holy Spirit will guide you to where he wants you.

How many of you, when you walk into a restaurant and you sit at the table and if the table is wobbly, you fix the table? All the wobbly table fixers, raise your hand. Me too. That's because we fix things, right? It's a problem and we're going to take care of it. How many of you walk into a restaurant, you sit down, and your table is just fine, but the strangers at the table next to you have a wobbly table, and you're just going to fix it for them because that's what you do? You people have a problem. You need to chill out a little bit.

Early on in our marriage, when Kari would tell me about the problem she was having, a relationship that she was struggling with, she wouldn't be halfway through her telling me what's going on to where I'm giving her a solution to this problem. Because I'm going to fix it. I fix things, right? Thankfully, we learned the communication technique where she leads in with, "I'm going to tell you something, but I don't want you to fix it. I just want you to listen to me." So, outwardly, I say *okay*. Inwardly I say, *Then why are we having this conversation? What's the point?* So, she would start to tell me her problem and, on the outside, I would listen and validate and affirm. On the inside, I would say, *Are you sure you don't want me to fix this problem? I don't know if anyone's told you, but I'm really smart. And I'm really good at fixing things. You can ask anyone. Ask the strangers with the wobbly table. I can fix things.*

That's because my solution and my opinions need to be heard, right? They're really awesome, so I have to get them out there. I need to share this with her. These solutions and these... Do you hear the arrogance in that? The arrogance that I've got to share my opinion, I've got to share my solution because it's the best one, frankly. There is arrogance in that when we just have to get it out there. And when we have that attitude with anyone that's sharing problems or things with us, and we just think they need to hear our solution, and that's the heart that we're coming with, we might as well always lead in with "I don't know if anyone's told you, but I'm really smart." That's not what we want.

Remember earlier I had you underline *genuinely concerned*. Timothy was genuinely concerned. Why? Because we need genuine concern to avoid this – false compassion. The point here is not for you to have a lens to look through and spot in other people. What we're looking for here is a mirror to reflect in, to examine ourselves and say, *Do I deal with false compassion sometimes? Is this something that I*

need to work on? Looking at myself and the way that I may always want to give an opinion or some advice or a solution. The thing about false compassion is the sin is pride. The sin is pride because, really, I'm the smartest one in the room. And I don't know if you've been told that, but that's the way it is. It's pride that brings that out. And if you're not sure, here's some ways to examine this. When you want to share an opinion or a solution and as you're about to give this opinion, think to yourself, *Am I willing to do the work of this solution?* Remember, compassion involves feeling sorrow for someone and having the drive to do something about it. If not, then you have to beware because it may be pride that is the sin at the root of this false compassion. I just want my opinion to be heard.

And I like sharing my opinion. I really do. My favorite quote regarding opinions was a few years back when I asked a friend and colleague, Dr. John Moll, if I could get his opinion on something. I loved his response. He said, "Of course you can. I'm not immune to the middle-aged man's pleasure of having his opinion asked." So, he shares that with me, and the thing is I've known men and women, young, middle aged, and old that love sharing their opinion. So, there's no specific demographic that deals with this. And I'm not immune from that.

The thing about false compassion is we can also experience false compassion fatigue. As we think that our opinion is the best, our solutions are the smartest, and we're sharing them with everybody, why isn't everybody listening to my advice because it's the best, and the outcomes aren't what they should be and it's a "See, I told you." And that is exhausting, isn't it? When you go around giving unsolicited advice and people aren't taking your advice, then you kind of take on ownership of the outcomes like that didn't have to happen, right? But it wasn't yours to own to begin with.

So, as a mostly recovered, pathologic giver of opinions, I started using a way of offering opinions, or a way of going about using my opinions. I think it's especially helpful with our growing teenage kids and younger kids even. But instead of leading out with, "Here's my opinion," you can ask, "Is it okay if I share my opinion?" Lead out with that. That does a couple of things. One is it gives them the opportunity to say no. And if they say no, shut your mouth. Even if you are thinking inside, I don't know if anyone's told you... But you've asked permission. What that does also is it alleviates you from the burden of the outcome. It helps you realize... It takes a step away from the pride of "my opinion is the best," and steps forward with "I have an opinion," and they understand they can do what they want with it. Great if they use my solution, great if not. It alleviates you from the burden of the outcome.

So now, in our marriage, and many years later and like many of you, we have kids, I have a career and a business and ministries and other organizations that I spend a lot of time solving problem in, right? So, under those circumstances, when someone says to you, "I don't want you to fix this problem," you are relieved. Enjoy that because you may have spent all day or all the previous day or weekend or week or whatever solving problems and for someone to say they don't want you to solve something, take that to heart. That's a good thing. Also, what it does, when she says that, is regardless of the outcome, I'm not owning the outcome of this. All I'm here for is to listen to that.

Now we're going to move back to the issue of compassion fatigue, having covered the false compassion fatigue that we can sometimes suffer from.

27 Indeed he (Epaphroditus) was ill, and almost died. But God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, to spare me sorrow upon sorrow. 28 Therefore I am all the more eager to send him, so that when you see him again you may be glad and I may have less anxiety. The thing is we don't know for sure why Epaphroditus was sick. I think it's a safe assumption, knowing everything else that we're told about him, that he was back at the church at Philippi, he was serving, he was so go, go, going, that he got a bit burned out, that he was tired physically, emotionally, relationally. His energy was shot and then, "Oh by the way, we're going to send you to Paul. You're going to go on a journey to minister to Paul to take care of needs and report to him about how things are going here." So, likely a long journey on top of already being exhausted... You get this? You see where this is going. He's burned out, most likely. Again, scripture doesn't tell us this. It's a safe assumption though that this is why he fell ill, even near to the point of death.

Shortly after we got married, we went on a snowing skiing vacation. I had grown up skiing and spent quite a bit of time on the slopes. My wife had not. So, I was pretty good at skiing. I don't know if anyone's told you... She was a beginner. So, as we're planning this, she said, "What are going to do? Am I going to get an instructor? Are we going to go to ski school?" I said, "You don't need an instructor, you don't need ski school. I'll be there and I don't know if anyone's told you.." You know what I told her. So, I started giving her advice about snow skiing.

The first thing I said is, "The first thing you need to learn is how to stop. She said, "Shouldn't I learn how to go before I learn how to stop." I said, "No. you're on these slick skis on a hill and gravity is going to pull you down the hill. You don't have to learn how to go; gravity will do that for you. You need to learn how to stop. The reason being you are only as good a skier as your ability to stop. You see that? You're only as good a skier as your ability to stop.

I said, "You're going to be out there and there will be people flying all around the place. In and out of trees, in and out of other skiers and over obstacles and this other stuff. And they may be really, really fast. But you have to know the bottom of the hill is coming. And they could be really good, but if they can't stop, it's not going to end well for them at the bottom of that hill." Learn to stop. You're only as good a skier as your ability to stop.

I love watching the Olympic downhill ski racing. You know they go upwards of like 40 miles per hour. They are flying down the hill. Do you ever see them after the finish line? They do that big turn to the side and they slide for however long to stop. They seem to go on forever before they stop, but they know how to stop. You see, one of those skiers could ski faster than anyone else on the slopes; they may go 50 mile per hour and blow away the competition. What if they didn't know how to stop. It's going to be their one and only run, right? Because it's not going to end well for them.

I believe this was part of Epaphroditus' problem. He didn't know how to stop. He just went and went and went and he burned himself out and became ill, near to the point of death. So, what he needed was rest. When we talk about rest, probably the most popular passage in scripture about rest comes from Matthew 11: 28-30 – **28 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened... Draw near to the Lord, right? ...and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me...** What is a yoke? It is a means by which the beast of burden carries its load. Jesus is saying, "Take my yoke upon you." He's not

saying “Give me your load,” he’s saying, “Take my yoke upon you. Do things the way I do thing.” **...for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.**” In other words, “You do things the way I do and it’s going to go easier for you.”

So, how did Jesus do things? 1) He was compassionate. When he fed the 5,000, we read in scripture that when he saw the crowds to begin with, he had compassion for them. He felt sorrow for them in all of their needs and was driven to action to do something about it. The first thing he did was heal their sick. And then we know he went further to feed them. Jesus had compassion. And that was one account of many. We know that Jesus spent his ministry serving people. He spent his ministry healing people. He spent his ministry evangelizing to people, telling them to repent of their sins and follow him. We know also that there was not a lack of opportunity for all of that. He could have been doing it 24/7, every day of his ministry. Is that the only thing that he did? “Take my yoke upon you. Do things the way that I do things.” What else did he do? He rested. He got alone with his heavenly father. He got alone with his family. He got alone with his friends. He rested, and he was restored. “Take my yoke upon you.” Jesus rested. And he calls us to rest too.

29 So then, welcome him (Epaphroditus) **in the Lord with great joy, and honor people like him...** One of the ways we can honor such men and women is not burning them out. **30 because he almost died for the work of Christ.** So, we see that the Philippians had this man of Epaphroditus who did great things in ministry. He wore a lot of hats. The Philippians sent him to Paul to minister to him and to report to him. The picture I get here is that by the time he gets to Paul, he’s exhausted, and that’s when he starts getting sick. I image the conversation with Paul with the way Paul is talking about sending him back and saying honor this man. When got to Paul, the conversation probably went something like Paul saying, “Bro, you need to rest.” I’m sure he called him Bro. He gets some rest, he restores him, and he sends him back. **He risked his life to make up for the help you yourselves could not give me.**

So, what can we take from this? 1) With the Philippians encouraging Epaphroditus in his ministry, it’s important and it’s good to be encouraged in your compassion. I believe that Epaphroditus would not have met his full ministry potential if not for the Philippians urging him, encouraging him, and motivating him in his compassion and the calling on his life. But at the same time, it is good to be tempered in your compassion. He may have died if it wasn’t for Paul saying, “You need to rest,” and restoring him and sending him back. Both of these things are good and there is a balance that takes place and there can be a tension as we feel this desire to meet people’s needs in their struggles and misfortunes. Both are good.

I want to wrap up this morning by bringing back a couple of passages that we’ve already covered in this series, as we talk about this compassion and compassion fatigue kind of balance and this tension that we have between the two.

Philippians 2: 3-4 – **3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, 4 not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.** You see, I believe, based on the fact that two weeks ago, Scott taught this, and last week, Ted put this back up... I think the Lord is trying to tell us something and I think this is it. Self-centeredness is the antidote for joy. As we’re covering Philippians, talking about greater joy and ways that we can

experience greater joy, we keep hearing that looking to the interest of others is better than looking to the interests of yourself. Having compassion wherever the Lord leads you, wherever the Holy Spirit communicates to you, this is your wheelhouse right here. This is something you're to be compassionate about. That's how we can experience greater joy.

Philippians 1: 21 – **21 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.** Have you ever thought about the fact that for the Christian, the death process is a little bit of a greedy process? For me, as I'm struggling here and I'm fighting the battle... We just came out of our Armor series where I'm fighting a battle, I'm taking a stand against the enemy and I'm fighting for the kingdom of God. When I die, I get to depart from all of the struggling and go be with the Lord. But for me, rather, to live is Christ. While I'm here, I'm still in the battle.

We often talk about what the Lord might say when we get to heaven. What is he going to say, and what do we desire for him to say? "Well done, good and faithful servant." That's what we want to hear. Have you ever thought about what Satan might say about you when you die? What might he say? Will he say, "Thank goodness she's gone... finally. It seemed like she was never going to die. She was in it for the long haul. And boy did she throw some punches. She served, she loved, she took care of people. She helped people repent. She saved souls for the Lord. And you know what? She with the Lord now. We lost her, but let's face it; we were never going to get our hooks in her. She's with the Lord now."

Or, as we talk about compassion fatigue, one thing I fear that could be said is that once someone has passed, Satan could say, "Yeah, you remember that guy? He started out pretty strong. He really fought. We had trouble with him. He led people to Christ. He was on fire. He served people. He was really highly compassionate, but then he fell for our scheme. We told him, 'You have to be all things to all people all the time. How dare you rest. How dare you see a struggle and not take it on as your own.' Do you remember that? Then we finally burned him out so much that we broke his resolve. And when we broke his resolve, he couldn't withstand temptation. And then we tore his family apart and look at all we were able to do with that. Yeah, he's gone to be with the Lord, but he was only a flash in the pan."

Woodland Hills, we should have compassion, lean into the Lord, lean into the calling on your life where he would have you to see sorrow and to take action for it. Have compassion but be wise to be in it for the long game. Don't crash at the bottom of the hill. Live your life in such a way like Christ did where you can rest so you can get on that lift, go back at the top, and make another run.

Let's stand and pray together as we dismiss. And I want to remind you that we have the prayer team down front that would love to meet with anyone that needs prayer. Don't hesitate to come on down after we close.

Father, we love you and we're grateful, Lord, for the compassion that you place upon our hearts. We ask that the Holy Spirit lead each of us individually and as a church as you guide us through seeing to take care of the needs of others as you see fit. We thank you for rest. We pray that those that need it would get it that they would be restored.

We love you and we praise you. In Christ name we pray. And everyone agreed and said... Amen.