

Everything seems to be broken

By [Ryan Dueck](#)

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It is an odd thing, I have discovered during my nearly three years as a pastor, to be entrusted with people's pain.

It's not an everyday occurrence, but today pain came calling. Two conversations with two people, both carrying crippling burdens of hurt and despair, sorrow and longing, both dealing with the complex cocktails of physical, spiritual, mental, and relational pain that characterize so many lives, both searching desperately for a word of hope, comfort, or encouragement. "Do you have a verse for me?" "Some advice?" "Wisdom?" "Help?" "Compassion?" It can be a simultaneously wonderful and helpless feeling to be invited into these deep and dark places. And it is scary to realize how little I often have to say.

Today's conversations weren't necessarily any more or less heartbreaking than others I have been a part of, but that didn't make them any easier. I still find it hard to know what to do. You ask questions, you listen, you invite elaboration, you listen, you gently probe and push and pull. You listen. And sometimes you end up back where you started. At one point, after a number of attempts to isolate "the problem," the face across from me just stopped and looked vacantly toward the [tree of life hanging](#) that graces the wall of my study. A few tears appeared. Then a few more. A couple of half-sentences were haltingly attempted. And then, "I don't know... everything just seems to be broken."

Yes. Everything *does* seem to be broken. And it hurts.

There were more tears, there were prayers, there were hugs. And then we went our separate ways, fortified by entreaties to our inscrutable God and the care of each other. Some

days it seems like these are the (only) things that can change the world. Other days, you wonder if they will even make a difference for the next hour.

I thought about pain's visit today as I sat (appropriately) in the dentist's office, waiting for my son to get four teeth extracted from his overcrowded mouth to make room for the ones on their way. I thought about Paul's words about suffering and glory in Romans 8. My son's groans through a swollen mouth full of gauze on the drive home seemed almost like a kind of enactment of my morning and of this passage. I thought about the groaning of all of creation, about the groaning of God's harassed and helpless children who await adoption, redemption, salvation.

Adoption, redemption, salvation. Such wonderful words. Such a necessary hope for a world where everything seems to be broken.

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