

Fumbling toward hope

By [Dennis Sanders](#)

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In June 2012, my Uncle David died. Years of diabetes caused his body to wear out. He was 60 years old.

For my mother, who was 20 years David's senior, the news was devastating. She was supposed to be the one who died first, not her baby brother.

The family gathered just outside Orlando, Florida for the funeral. David was an active member of an Apostolic church in nearby Sanford. As we went to the viewing at the funeral home and then to the church the next day, I came face to face with all those cliches you hear when someone dies. "God is in control." "He's not in pain anymore." "This all happens for a reason."

My seminary-trained brain tells me I'm not supposed to accept such trivial sayings. I've learned that such words just cover up the pain that people are really going through. I'm supposed to see such statements as a twisting of theology and incredibly insensitive to those suffering.

And yes, most of the time such phrases can do more harm than good.

But as I sat in the funeral service and heard the pastor use some well-worn cliches, he also reminded me—reminded all of us—that even in the midst of our pain and mourning, we know that death doesn't have the final word. In the middle of all those cliches there was hope: hope in the coming resurrection, hope in the day when a wife no longer loses her husband, hope in a day when children won't mourn their dead-too-soon father, hope in the day when all creation will be healed.

This is what Paul is trying to tell his fellow Christians in the letter to the Thessalonians. He is conveying a hope mixed in with the present grief. Paul understands that we now live with pain and sadness, but there is a quiet hope that one day, death will be no more.

Maybe, just maybe, those trite sayings by the pastor and friends of my late uncle were a fumbling attempt to describe what seems undecipherable: a day when living and dead come together, when death loses its sting.

It's something to hope for amidst the pain.