

Loss, death, and paths not taken

By [David Williams](#)

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It was a rough time recently for the area of the church I serve, as the news of a young man's suicide hit the town hard. It was a hard weekend, as one of the faith communities just a short walk from my own spoke out words of sorrow and blessing over that life.

I didn't know him personally. But he was a child of the town. In a community where people still know one another, it was clear that so many of the folks at my church had been touched by his life. I feel their hurt and the resonance of his loss through so many people around me, like placing your hand on a bell that's been struck, and feeling it hum against your skin.

It's a difficult thing to process. Here, you had a life that is unquestionably full of promise, and then that promise seems to have vanished like smoke in a strong breeze. All those moments that you hoped to share, gone.

It feels both so unnecessary and so understandable, particularly if you've been through the fires of adolescence yourself. Everything feels so immediate, so intense, so radically defining at that moment . . . and if you're struggling with something, that can feel like it's your whole world.

I remember that feeling, in the same way I remember being a kid and I remember being 25. If we are to remain ourselves, we can't forget that feeling. Life was intense, immediate, and the encounter with the pressing realities of adulthood had that radiance that comes from our encounter with the new. There were moments of failure, and they were abject and abysmal. There were moments of joy and passion, and they were everything.

And when you're struggling with something, particularly the dark veil of depression, it can feel like that moment of struggle is forever. There's no escape from it. The only way out, you think in that moment, is something irrevocable.

That's wrong, because it's not true. It is not a reflection of reality. The reality is that there are people who love you, who care for you, and who will be impacted by your loss. The reality is that if you wait a day, a week, a month—life will seem different.

But it's also wrong because it doesn't reflect the reality of creation. In the wild universe in which we find ourselves, there's always a different path. There's always a brighter and more life-giving choice. The God who makes all things possible does not just set one path before any of us. There are paths that lead to sorrow, isolation, and darkness, sure. But we do not have to walk them. We are free to turn away, and choose something different. That isn't easy, particularly with the blinders of depression constraining our vision. But it's real. That potential is there, resting in the knowledge of God.

And that truth, so important to hold in our times of despair, is also important to hold when we have lost someone too young. What we mourn isn't just the life that has passed, but the life we will not know. We mourn the moments we will not share with them, that future which is now precluded.

There, [from my own faith](#), there is a solace. Because although that future is precluded from our knowledge here in this life, it is not precluded from the knowledge of God. The Creator knows not just what we have done and what we will do, but what we might have done and what we might yet do. Though hidden from us, we can trust that those unfulfilled moments are not unknown to God. God knows what that life would have been, with a knowledge so deep that it is not simply knowing, but being.

In the heart of God, everything that our loved one *could* have been is held as surely as the reality we inhabit is held, because there is nothing that God does not know in its fullness.

When we look to a life cut short, to possibilities that seem suddenly gone, there is comfort in knowing that just as the past is not forgotten, neither is that future.

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