

Shortly after I exited the pediatric intensive care unit, I received a text from a father. I'd just spent two hours with him alongside his critically ill son. Walking to the parking garage at the University of Michigan, C. S. Mott Children's Hospital, the dim light didn't stop me from reading:

"Scott, I really feel like things will work out. Would you take a deep breath of fresh air for me today?"

Four years earlier, Pierre had witnessed the death of his first boy a day and a half after birth. Now two-year-old Christian was facing a similar outcome. I also lost a child to the disease monster and have found a new mission mentoring fathers of chronically ill children.

Even though I pray for the right words to say before I enter the pediatric ICU, I wasn't really prepared for Pierre's request that late Sunday afternoon.

Could I give a lifesaving breath of fresh air to someone who was suffering?

The next morning I went for a run, taking the occasional deep breath and praying for wisdom about Pierre's request. When I got home I found this verse:

"The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life" (Job 33:4).

In this verse, Elihu—a trusted friend—came alongside Job—the suffering saint—who just wanted to die. In my mind I can just imagine Elihu, his feet dangling over the edge of the pit, looking down at Job as he talked. He reminded Job, buddy-to-buddy, they were all made from the same clay and had been given the same breath of life.

When we are in a crisis, it's often hard or impossible to do simple tasks like taking a time-out from life or making a phone call to a trusted friend. When we're overwhelmed, we can't even take a deep breath.

As I thought about what Pierre's text meant, I think his words had a double meaning—they were for me too.

When I read, "I feel like things are going to work out," Pierre might have been saying that to comfort me. He knew of my loss, and that is why we connected so deeply.

Truth be told, we all have times of suffering, and we all need a friend we can ask for companionship in times of crisis. We need to give others permission to ask the hard questions and be ready to reach down and comfort them.

I often feel like Job and get angry at God about my own loss. Maybe now I can step back and look at it a bit differently, even finding a bit of hope and understanding as I try to process losing Evan. I literally took a deep breath or two after my run that morning when I found the verse.

Even in the middle of my own suffering and grief, the breath of God gives me life. And I can share that same deep breath of life with others.

I don't know if I will ever tell Pierre my revelation, but the last few times we've talked, I felt like he already knows. Every time we talk we are both reaching down to each other to help the other one up, just like Elihu reached down to Job when he was in the pit of despair.

What can you do today to support those who are suffering? Maybe you have experienced a loss or disappointment that is preparing you to come alongside those who are in the pit.

Take a breath like the one Pierre asked me to take that Sunday afternoon, and the answer may come. Listen to those you serve, but also to the gentle nudge from the One above—even when that nudge comes from a suffering friend. Maybe God is telling us both to take a deep breath.