

## [Reflections of a Paralytic](#)

All Life Is Sacred

### [Daniel James Needed Help to Live](#)

A story [came out this weekend](#) about a UK rugby player, 23 year old Daniel James, who had his family take him to Switzerland for a legal assisted suicide after he was paralyzed in a rugby accident.

I have been thinking about this for the past few days, dear readers, as I've been having a hard time figuring out where to even begin with this one. Stories like this literally break my heart. What is most disappointing are the various [statements made](#) by James' family regarding his physical condition and decision to die:

He couldn't walk, had no hand function, but constant pain in all of his fingers. He was incontinent, suffered uncontrollable spasms in his legs and upper body and needed 24-hour care.

Dan had tried to commit suicide three times but this was unsuccessful due to his disability. His only other option was to starve himself.

Dan had been a lively and hugely active young man he was highly intelligent, lovable and so loved by his family.

Whilst not everyone in Dan's situation would find it as unbearable as Dan, what right does any human being have to tell any other that they have to live such a life, filled with terror, discomfort and indignity, what right does one person who chooses to live with a particular illness or disability have to tell another that that they should have to.

As I sit in my own wheelchair, nearly nine years post injury, I can certainly relate to the daily frustrations that come with adjusting to life with a spinal cord injury. It's not an immediate transition and it is physically and mentally challenging. But who says life with an SCI has to be a life "filled with terror and indignity?" Life is what you make it, whatever your physical capabilities or limitations might be. Every day people with spinal cord injuries live perfectly happy, healthy lives. Unfortunately James, who was only a little over a year post injury, was unable or unwilling to see this yet. He was still dealing with the shock of this sudden and dramatic change in his life - a healing process that takes time, patience, family support and in some cases a good amount of professional counseling.

According to [one report](#), James' decision to kill himself was because he was not prepared to live what he felt was a "second class existence." This is a great tragedy. No human being, whatever situation they're in, should ever feel that he or she has such a worthless life. *Ever!* And if they do, it is our duty to assure them that their life matters and has merit. Sick and depressed people like James do not need help to die - they need help to live, to understand the inestimable value of their own life and their ability to pursue happiness despite the tragedy of their current situation.

As R.E.M. put it\*:

When the day is long and the night, the night is yours alone,  
When you're sure you've had enough of this life, well hang on.  
Don't let yourself go, everybody cries and everybody hurts sometimes.

Suffering in this life is unavoidable, we'll all experience it to some degree at some point (or many points) in our lives, and it is often unbearable, but we must never violate human dignity to end or avoid it. Facing our fears and accepting and overcoming life's hardships shapes our character and strengthens us as persons. What's more, we have the [consolation](#) of Christ [on the Cross](#)! When we unite our sufferings to Him there, we are never alone. He makes up for the strength we lack in carrying our own crosses, which then become the very instruments which lead to our sanctification (1 Pet 1:6-7).

*May you be filled with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding to live in a manner worthy of the Lord, so as to be fully pleasing, in every good work bearing fruit and growing in the knowledge of God, strengthened with every power, in accord with his glorious might, for all endurance and patience, with joy* (Colossians 1:9-11)

Beautiful words from Pope Benedict during his very brief [visit to a group of young people with disabilities](#) in New York this year:

God has blessed you with life, and with differing talents and gifts. Through these you are able to serve him and

society in various ways. While some people's contributions seem great and others' more modest, the witness value of our efforts is always a sign of hope for everyone.

Sometimes it is challenging to find a reason for what appears only as a difficulty to be overcome or even pain to be endured. Yet our faith helps us to break open the horizon beyond our own selves in order to see life as God does. God's unconditional love, which bathes every human individual, points to a meaning and purpose for all human life. Through his Cross, Jesus in fact draws us into his saving love (cf. Jn 12:32) and in so doing shows us the way ahead - the way of hope which transfigures us all, so that we too, become bearers of that hope and charity for others.

Do take the time to read Mark Pickup's moving essay on [The Meaning of Suffering: A Christian Perspective](#)

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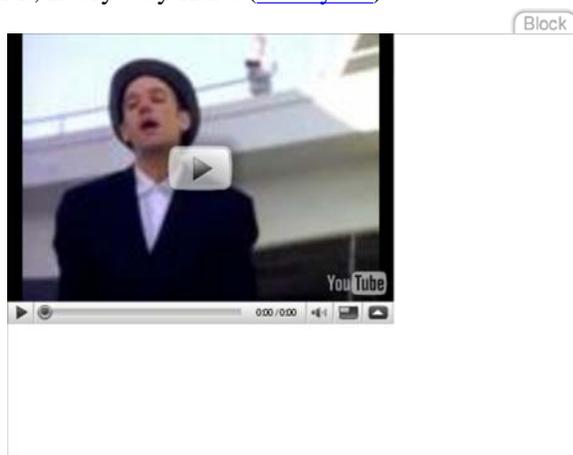
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\*R.E.M., Everybody Hurts ([read lyrics](#)):



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