

How to Stop Believing that Humanity is Doomed

A shift in perspective can make the difference between despair and hope.

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Several weeks ago, at the end of our monthly [therapy](#) session, a client ended our conversation by posing a question: “In all the sessions you’ve done with all your clients over the years, what have you found to be the single most important thing you’ve learned?” We agreed that I’d reflect for a few weeks and respond in our next session, but I felt the wheels start turning right away. The question percolated in my mind in my quiet moments. It really got me thinking about the indelible impression my work with clients has left on me.

Though I find being a therapist to be generally inspiring, I have often wondered whether my intimate access to the real lives, real relationships, and raw emotions of so many people might one day leave me jaded. These last two years, especially, I’ve felt a gnawing sense of concern that I might be growing cynical about humanity. I’ve wondered what this could mean for my work, my life, my outlook. Perusing the comments section of any news article or [social media](#) post about current events gives me the feeling that I’m not alone in my concerns. These comments suggest a general sense of world-weariness that, for some, is accompanied by the sentiment that humanity is doomed to destroy itself. Many of us, it seems, are struggling to see the goodness in mankind or find cause for hope about the future.

We have good reason to be concerned about the state of humanity. Any conscious citizen of the world can see that there are numerous fractures in society that need mending. But while our concerns can spawn cynical views about the future or lead us to conclude that humanity is doomed, they can also be a source of compassion or inspire us to be the change.

When my client posed his question about my experience as a therapist, I found myself reflecting on it through the lens of my experience as a person inhabiting a world that can feel scary and bleak. And the more I thought about it, the clearer it became that, in fact, a singular lesson has emerged from all the hours I’ve spent with the clients I’ve seen. And it’s this: If I try to look at humanity in a large-scale way, based on what I see in the news or social media, I feel discouraged and afraid. But getting to zoom that lens in to individual people, in the way that the therapy experience allows me to, I feel encouraged and inspired. This is the lesson I’ve learned, and I think it can be a lesson for all of us.

When we feel inclined to form conclusions about humanity, maybe we can choose a different point of focus. Maybe instead of painting with broad strokes and convincing ourselves that mankind is doomed, we can choose to look for all the examples we can find of kindness, [generosity](#), humility, grace, courage, inspiration, and even love. Maybe we can encourage ourselves to embody those qualities we want to see more of, and act in the ways we wish all people would. It's possible—at least I choose to believe it is—that instead of letting our frustrations with “people these days” lead us to the conclusion that we're doomed, we can let it open us up to curiosity about how we can shift our focus, our energy, our attitudes, and our actions toward creating the world we'd prefer to inhabit.