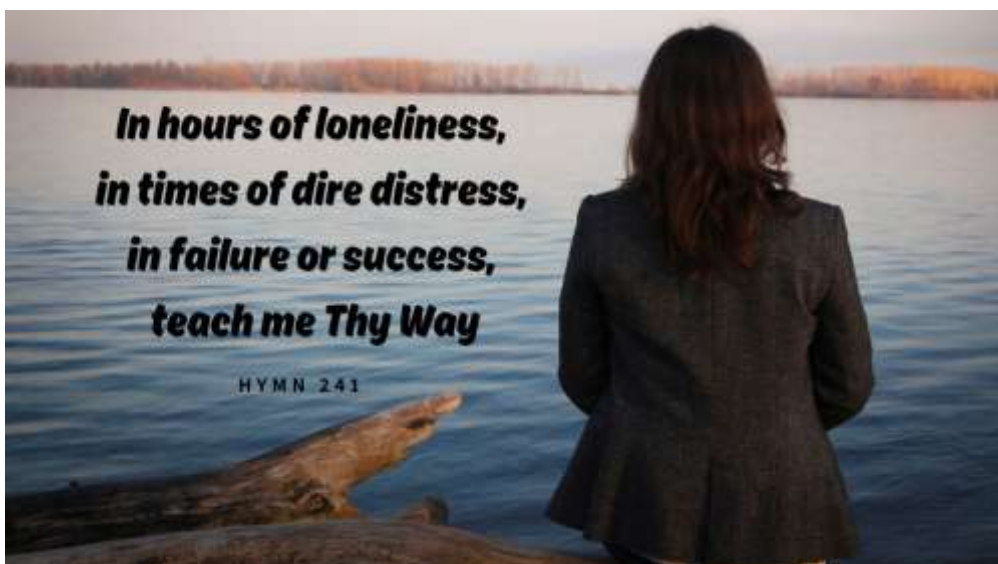


## HOW TO SUPPORT SOMEONE WHO'S STRUGGLING DURING THE HOLIDAYS

The holiday season is supposed to be a time of love, laughter and fun. But for some this can be a time of stress, unhappiness, and the loneliest time of the year, which can make them feel as if something is wrong with them. Instead of feeling festive, happy and loved, they might feel lonely, be grieving, sad, frustrated or stressed. They might compare themselves to staged posts on social media, concluding that everyone else is having, “the most wonderful time of the year.” **It also can turn into triggers**, such as it might be the first year without a loved one due to their passing and it may remind them of the last times they celebrated with them. For those who have lost a loved one, recently split up, struggling financially, not being able to travel to join family and friends, or are just feeling low emotionally distant, it’s a time of year that leaves them particularly vulnerable to feelings of loneliness. **It can be difficult to feel joyous when you’re surrounded by people who are happily spending time with their loved ones, and you are at home alone.**

Everyone would like to spend the holidays with people they love and care about. Remember how blessed you are if you can do this. Many others are not so fortunate, so if you know someone who will be alone over the holiday season, one of the kindest things you can do is get in touch, as it can make a massive difference to their holiday’s season. By giving the gift of caring and involving them in activities, you can make a difference and help someone better manage the ups and downs of this period. So, let’s not make them face this season alone and the feeling of being left out.

**As brethren and sisters, we need to treat each other as a genuine family, as when we are baptised, we become adopted family members (Galatians 4:5).** God wants us to fellowship and care for each other, the ecclesia consists of God’s chosen. John records the question, that he or she who loves not a brother or sister, how can he love God? (1 John 4:20). Love for our brethren and sisters and their company is a commandment from Christ and is our calling. The apostle Paul encourages us to follow Jesus’ example by showing compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience (Hebrews 10:24-25, 1 Thessalonians 5:11). Jesus instructs us to help others, John 15:12, **“My commandment is this: Love each other as I have loved you.”** In Luke, Jesus says Give, and you will receive, and in Proverbs 11:25, it says a generous person will prosper, whoever refreshes others will be refreshed.



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Different ways you can offer support and kindness to those who may be facing difficulties during the holidays.

**Pray for them** – We need to pray for them to find comfort and given the strength to face their journey. We are instructed to pray for one another.

**Make the time:** Think about the brethren and sisters in your ecclesia who may be struggling and make time to check in with them. Show them that you care, and you are thinking of them, this could be a text, a card, tee up a walk, call them on the phone, write a letter, or drop by for a visit. A way to make sure everyone is included is to go through our ecclesial program and make sure you have checked in on the ones that may be lonely or that you have not heard from for a while.

**Acknowledge it:** Let them know it's OK to feel overwhelmed, sad or stressed at this time of the year. Acknowledging what they are feeling, can help them feel understood and comforted.

**Listen:** One of the most helpful and comforting types of communication is active listening. To be an active listener, let the person who is lonely or finding it hard talk about their pain. Don't underestimate the importance of just 'being there' for them.

**Be gentle:** Be understanding to the fact that they may be dealing with grief, loneliness, financial stress, or other challenges. **Don't force or tell them to cheer up.** Your intentions might be good, but this often isn't helpful.

**Respect their choices:** While supporting them through the holiday season, understand that everyone copes differently, and it's important to honour their choices regarding how they want to handle their emotions. Don't make assumptions or judgments.

**Old traditions and new traditions:** Old traditions for holidays might cause sadness if someone is grieving, can't be with loved ones or is financially stretched. If old traditions no longer bring joy create new traditions to make them feel comfortable. **Instead of guessing what they want, ask them what they think.** Show your support by honouring their wishes.

**Offer practical support:** If someone isn't ready to talk, think about what practical support you can provide. Whether it is making a cuppa, helping with childcare or cooking a meal, small gestures can be comforting for those finding the holidays difficult.

**Offer services:** Let them know help is available, to help them to navigate their feelings, and if they need an expert listener. 24/7 helplines services are available across Australia for them, such as [Lifeline](#) and [Beyond Blue](#).

**Follow up after the holidays:** It's important to remember that other times of year can be hard, too, like birthdays, anniversaries, and special occasions. Don't let your support dwindle when we get back to our day-to-day life after the holidays, follow up with them. Maybe set a reminder to send a text message regularly to let them know you are thinking about them, and mark key dates in your calendar and commit to calling when these dates come around.

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We can also reassure our brethren and sisters of the fact God knows their suffering, and He recognises their feeling and is concerned for them. (Psalm 86:15) and that God is full of compassion, and He is gracious, long suffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth. Also, remind them of God's promises to us:

**God sees us** – We never walk alone; God is with us every step of our life. (Genesis 16:13)

**God hears us** – God is always listening. Jonah called for help and God listened to his cry (Jonah 2:2).

**God knows our suffering** – God recognises ways we are hurting and is concerned for us (Exodus 2:25)

**God is with us** – God will be a refuge for us in our times of trouble or distress, we are never alone, God is always there and waits for our call (Psalm 23:4).

**God is near to the broken-hearted** – God is the God of all comfort: who comfort's us in all our troubles (Psalm 34:18).

**God receives us when we're overwhelmed** – For those that are weary and burdened, God will give them rest (Matthew 11:28).

Don't underestimate the value of little things, a kind word or small gesture. The greatest gift you can give someone that is lonely is your time, because when you give your time, you are giving a portion of your life.

We need to remember, whatever is done for one of His disciples is rewarded as being done for the Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew 25:40). Let's do the best we can to minimise loneliness in our brothers and sisters as we travel together this side of the Kingdom.

*A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another. (John 13:34-35).*

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