

Fighting Loneliness During Christmas

This is the third year I've posted some variation of the following thoughts for **Christmas**. I'm tempted to come up with something more positive and inspirational. If you're not personally enduring a long season of **loss**, I suspect I sound like Debbie Downer through these posts. Yet I remain convinced that nothing drives us to authentic faith in Jesus like desperation. And I know and love so many desperate people right now.

The **trial** of our faith works **patience**. Patience. Endurance. Perseverance. These are as important virtues in the **Christian** walk as the more popular peace or temperance. The **holidays** each year draw our attention clearly to the passage of time and highlight our need for **endurance**.

I have spent my fair share of Christmases crying under the Christmas tree in the dark, staring at the lights on the tree, dreaming of the Christmas I want rather than the Christmas I have. This Christmas, it's stressful (we just moved, and our house is still a chaotic mess), yet it's a good stress, and I thank God that I don't foresee crying under the tree this year. But I've had enough lonely Christmases in the past, longing for something different, to respect the fact that for many of you, the Christmas season puts a harsh spotlight on the losses in your life. Perhaps you lost something you had—a child, a spouse, a parent, a relationship. Perhaps you feel the loss of something you long to have but have not yet gotten to hold—a child, a husband.

The **holiday season** makes it very clear exactly what we are longing for and exactly what we are mourning. It is especially hard to distract ourselves from our losses during this season. If you find yourself in this place, with the spotlight shining on your losses so you cannot escape the pain whether sitting under the tree, singing a carol, buying a gift or opening a present, here are some thoughts from someone who has been

there before.

1. Your loss is real, and it is OK to feel it deeply. But know also that you are not alone in your **loneliness**. Despite what you likely sense, most others are not enjoying the holidays unconditionally. There is not something wrong with you. Or actually, there *is* something wrong, but there is something wrong with all of us.

So don't let the feelings of loss, loneliness and isolation go unanswered in your own head. You may feel that you are alone and no one else understands the weight of the loss you carry through the holidays, but the truth is that many of your brothers and sisters in Christ are carrying such burdens, and you are not alone in your loss. Feel your loss, for it is real. But fight Satan when he tempts you to isolate yourself or distance yourself from others because of it.

2. Holiday pain can also clarify what you do have. Forget turkeys and cranberry sauce, gifts given and received. Stocking stuffers are overrated. Instead, understand that your circumstances also shine a spotlight on Christ. When you aren't distracted by Christmas frivolities (or enamored by them, as many of us are), you can recognize the void that can only be filled by one thing—Christ Himself. It was during lonely Christmases that I discovered Colossians 1 and sat under a tree reading it to myself. It sustained me—and not just for a season. I've gone back to that passage for a lifetime.

Colossians 1 tells us exactly who arrived in the manger that night. As the holidays spotlight the pain of your losses, I encourage you to let God's description of His Son shine an alternate spotlight on all you have in Him this season.

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He

is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

“And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him” (Col. 1:15-22, ESV).

Wherever you are this season, daughter of God and bride of Christ, I hope this vision of the eternal One you have in Christ will sustain you during lonely times. You are loved and wanted by Christ. You do have a family, in every idealistic sense of the term. It is in Him and with Him. That truth won't erase the pain of your very real loss this holiday season, but may it be the balm that soothes and comforts you, for by His wounds, you are healed.

*Adapted from **Wendy Alsup's** blog, . Wendy has authored three books including By His Wounds You are Healed: How the Message of Ephesians Transforms a Woman's Identity. She is also a wife, mom and college math teacher who loves ministering to women.*