

12 Things to Do If You Are Lonely at Christmas

The Christmas holiday season is promoted as a time of togetherness. Families sometimes travel long distances to be with loved ones for Christmas.

Holiday parties, family gatherings, giving of gifts and even church events are usually focused on the joy and celebration of being together.

But, what if that's not you this year? What if you're lonely this Christmas?

What if your family is messed up, and being together only stirs up more trauma? What if you have no family or friends nearby inviting you to be with them? What if your marriage is in trouble, your kids are estranged or outside circumstances are keeping you apart? What if you're spending your first Christmas after the loss of a loved one?

Feeling lonely and being alone are not the same. You can feel lonely in a crowd; I've been there. You can feel at peace when you're alone; I've been there, too.

The important thing is to take positive action, to plan in advance. You may not (and probably won't) experience the ideal Christmas you think you want. But you're not a victim.

Don't let the loneliness of Christmas happen to you; you happen to your Christmas.

Taking Charge of your Christmas Experience

Wearing yourself out trying to please others or wallowing in self-pity are easy traps to fall into during the holidays. You have other choices. Here are some positive actions to consider as you choose to happen to your Christmas.

1. Engage your senses. Your environment has an impact on your emotions. Go ahead and enjoy some Christmas music, holiday decorations, scents of evergreen or fresh-baked goodies or candlelight. Take a bubble bath. Let the snowflakes (or raindrops) fall on your tongue. Drink some hot chocolate. Drive around and see the Christmas lights. Find things to fill up your senses that you can enjoy.

2. Watch your favorite Christmas movie. I'm a sucker for the old classics *It's a Wonderful Life* and *A Christmas Carol*. I want to shout with George Bailey as he runs through town yelling "Merry Christmas!" I breathe easier as Ebenezer wakes up on Christmas morning a changed man. You may have other favorites. The truly good Christmas movies help you see that you too have a wonderful life, and you too can be changed.

3. Spoil yourself in some way. You are worth taking care of. Sitting in your chair moping in front of the TV won't help. Do something for you. Get a spa treatment, a manicure or a makeover. Go to a movie. Take yourself out to dinner. Go through your town's Christmas celebration. (Our city has a Trail of Lights. Your town may do something to celebrate the holidays; check it out.)

4. Stay rested. Being mentally, physically or spiritually tired makes it so much harder to be positive. Get enough sleep. If you're stressed at work, take some days off even if you don't have family to be with. If there's a problem you can't figure out that can wait, take a week and don't think about it. Quite trying so hard and just spend an hour—or an afternoon—being in God's presence.

5. Get some exercise. Being physically active helps your mood. If you're stuck with people you don't like, excuse yourself and take a walk alone. If you're alone and tempted to veg in front of the TV, put on your walking shoes and get outside. The oxygen to your brain and the endorphins exercise releases will help you think and feel better in many ways.

6. Give a gift anonymously. Be someone's Secret Santa. A lonely coworker, a single parent, a child, a neighbor, a family your church suggests—give them a Christmas gift anonymously. There's something especially satisfying about giving without making it about you. Just the creativity that may be needed to carry it out can engage your mind and lift your spirits.

7. Help someone else. There's always someone lonelier than you are. Reach beyond yourself. Stretch yourself. God put something inside you that someone else needs. I promise you it's there. Find it and give it. That may be a phone call, a letter or volunteering at your church, an animal shelter, a program feeding the homeless, a nursing home or hospital and more. Get over yourself already. Your mood will lift.

8. Read a good book. A book can inspire, educate and stretch your mind. It can transport you to another world and leave you permanently better than before. Reading engages a part of your mind that watching entertainment does not. If you can't think of what book to read, search Amazon for a book about someone who overcame the same struggle you're having. Read their story and choose to move forward.

9. Forgive someone. Sometimes (not always) your loneliness is of your own making. If you have family or friends you could be with but hard feelings keep you away, decide to let it go. Let God handle any "punishment" they may need. Consciously choose how much time you may want to spend with them, but just do it. You be the one to make the first move.

10. Go to church. Almost every church has a special Christmas service. Don't stay away. Christmas is about the birth of a Baby, about the proclamation of peace into a world at war, about God coming to be with us even when we don't deserve it. Let those truths about the true meaning of Christmas fill your heart with the peace the angels proclaimed. And you might even be surprised by joy.

11. Give Jesus a gift. Don't forget something special for the One who gave Himself completely for you. If there's a place in your heart you've been holding back, give it to Him this year. Consider a monetary gift to your church or favorite ministry. Give Him your future by taking the next step to serve His kingdom in the way He has built you to do.

12. Read the Christmas story in a new version. On Christmas Eve or Christmas morning, don't neglect to read the Christmas story again. If it's become old, try reading it in a new version. If you don't have a physical Bible in a different version, try the YouVersion Bible app on any Internet-enabled device. Picture yourself in the story. Envision what that very first Christmas was all about and think of what that makes possible for you today.

You can celebrate Christmas even if you're lonely. Decide to happen to your Christmas and put some of these decisions in place today. {eo}

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