

Coping with Loneliness at Christmas

By Rusty Wright

Tis the season to be...gloomy? Feeling low this Christmas season? You're not alone.

Amid cheery songs, festive parties, gifts, and good wishes, many lonely people are crying or dying on the inside. Maybe you're one of them. I was.

During a horrible year, my wife of 20 years divorced me, my employer of 25 years fired me, and I had a cancer scare. As I drove home one night, lovely Christmas music came on the radio. Melancholy aching hit me. I was still processing the deep pain of abandonment and loss.

No fun.

Does even thinking about that song make you depressed? The spoofed 'Porky

Pig' version could get you laughing. Google will take you there. But please, wait until finishing this short article to search, OK?

Several factors can produce Christmas blues.¹ Hectic activity can bring physical and



Blue Christmas

Romantic estrangement, family strife, and bereavement can make your holidays dismal. One of Elvis Presley's most popular songs was 'Blue Christmas'. A lonely crooner mourns heart-breaking lost love. Performers from The Beach Boys to Celine Dion, Loretta Lynn, and Jon Bon Jovi have recorded it.

emotional stress. Overspending can produce financial pressure. Year-end reflection and focus on loss can magnify sorrow.

McGill University psychologist Dr.



of depression the medical community doesn't completely understand. The Mayo Clinic says genetics, age, and body chemistry could be the culprits. Mayo recommends seeing your doctor if you feel down for days and have motivation problems. Symptoms can include changing sleep patterns and appetite, feeling hopeless, contemplating suicide, or seeking

comfort in alcohol.⁴

Michael Spevack notes: 'Overeating and over drinking combined with a decreased amount of sleep is also a formula for extreme emotional swings'. Depression can lead to thoughts of suicide, especially among the socially isolated, he says.²

The 'Empty Chair'

Is your family apart this season by necessity or choice? Maybe an 'empty chair' reminds you of your pain. Does Christmas 'Ho, ho, ho' contrast with your deep anguish?

One widow recalled how she felt during the Christmas after her husband's death:

Little mattered to me. I didn't want to hear carols. I didn't want to be cheered up. I didn't want to look at perky Christmas cards. I wanted the same thing I'd wanted every day for eight months: the strength to force myself out of bed in the morning, to brush my teeth, and to eat.³

One possible influence, Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), is a form

Coping

How can you cope with Christmas loneliness? Some suggestions:

● Spend time with people, especially positive ones who lift your spirits. Perhaps you'll be grateful for their cheer.

● Exercise regularly. Blood pumping can help clear your mind.

● Eat right. Chocaholics beware. Overindulgence can mean temporary highs followed by disappointing flab.

● Lights on! Enjoy sunlight, outdoors if possible. Brighten up your home and workplace. Light therapy sometimes helps SAD.

● Budget your gift spending and stick with your budget. Prevent January bill shock.

● Talk about your feelings. Keeping them bottled up can mean anxiety, ulcers, sour disposition, and/or explosion. Need a trusted, listening friend? Try a local church.

● Give to others. Volunteer. Medical professor Stephen Post is convinced that giving is essential for optimum physical and mental health in our fragmented society. He says some California physicians give volunteerism 'prescriptions' to their Medicare patients.⁵

● Seek counsel. I used to be embarrassed to obtain professional counsel. Now I recommend it. We all can use good advice navigating life's storms.

● Develop spiritual roots. I'm glad that before my dark days began, I had a friendship with God.

Tired of friends who betray, manipulate, disrespect, or desert you? God won't. He cares for you, values you, will listen to you, and comfort you. You can trust Him. He always wants your best.

One early believer put it this way: 'Since God did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all, won't God, who gave us Christ, also give us everything else?'⁶ His point: God loved us enough to send Jesus, his only Son, to die on the cross to pay the penalty for our wrong, our sins. What a demonstration of love! I can trust a God like that. Then Jesus rose from the dead so He could live inside us and become our friend.

Notes

¹ 'Christmas Holiday Depression', 18 December 2005, www.medicalnewstoday.com.

² Ibid.

³ Mary Cartledgehayes, 'Blue Christmas – Grieving through The Holidays', *Christian Century*, December 27, 2003, www.findarticles.com

⁴ 'Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)', *Mayo Clinic Staff*, September 24, 2007, www.mayoclinic.com.

⁵ Stephen Post and Jill Neimark, *Why Good Things Happen to Good People* (New York: Broadway Books, 2007).

⁶ Romans 8:32

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