

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

The holidays are often a difficult and lonely time for me. How can I feel more joy and peace during this season?

When you're alone—whether as a young adult away from home for the first time, a married couple living far from loved ones, a single adult who has not married, or someone who has lost a spouse to death or divorce—the holidays can

be difficult. Perhaps you've already tried taking cookies to neighbors, visiting the sick, or counting your blessings. If it was nice but your loneliness still lingers, try these suggestions.

- **Inform family and friends that you're lonely.** We often assume they know and don't care. In reality, they may be surprised about your needs.

- **Keep yourself busy with holiday service you enjoy.** You'll spend less time feeling blue.

- **Take a trip.** There's no law stating

you must be home for the holidays. You might feel better if you're not surrounded by constant reminders of what you do not have.

- **Accept the kindness of others.**

Sometimes it's easy not to accept an invitation because you think the person is offering "just to be nice." If the person is thoughtful enough to offer, accept and be grateful.

- **Build new traditions.** Create traditions that include reading books, preparing foods, and attending events during holidays. Invite others to join you.

Remember, not every suggestion works for each person. Try them and see what works. Something that is effective this time may not be in the future, so keep the list handy. If all else fails, remind yourself that "this too shall pass."

Cindy Beck, Utah

Several years ago I was surprised to find myself facing a holiday season alone. My husband had passed away a few years before, and my daughters and their families, scattered across the country, found it impossible to come home. Time off from work for travel was not available.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY BRADLEY SLADE, EXCEPT AS NOTED; LEFT: INSET COURTESY OF CINDY BECK; RIGHT: INSET COURTESY OF JEANETTE DICKSON



I realized that self-pity would not change the situation and would only make me feel worse. I decided to concentrate on what was good about this time when everyone around me would be shopping, cooking, and welcoming family members. Members of the ward had been kind and extended invitations, but for me, participating in someone else's traditions was too hard.

With several days of free time, I decided to cook a scaled-down Christmas dinner for one and finally get to my genealogy. Although I had dabbled with family history for years, other responsibilities had taken priority, and my sporadic efforts sat in boxes and files. I decided this would be a wonderful uninterrupted time to work, and I began gathering the tools I would need.

As my time off began and I immersed myself in learning and research, I could scarcely find time to eat or sleep. I found a wonderful source for researching my German line and spent hours entering information into Personal Ancestral File and learning to use online genealogical resources. I found that, instead of

feeling alone, I seemed at times to be surrounded by these ancestors who seemed so eager to be found, and I was definitely not lonely.
Jeanette Dickson, Oregon

When memories generate feelings of loneliness and dread, I fill each day—including holidays, anniversaries, and birthdays—with worthwhile, easy-to-reach goals, and I actively strive to reach them. This keeps me living in the present and generates feelings of satisfaction and joy. In addition, I can recall these experiences when difficult days arrive again in the future.

LaVerd John, Utah

When loneliness creeps in, I've often found hope and courage in prayerfully studying and applying this principle that King Benjamin taught: "When ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God" (Mosiah 2:17). I pray to Heavenly Father and plead for direction to individuals I can help.

As I've been inspired to visit the

temple more frequently, to take proactive steps in my missionary efforts and in my home teaching assignments, and to strive

to use opportunities to be of service to God's children, I have found that these things have proven to be great sources of joy and peace.

Obioma Chimauzom Madumere, Nigeria

I joined the United States Marine Corps some years ago and was between training over Thanksgiving. Due to the short length of the holiday, the instructors did not allow us to go home. However, they would not allow us to stay on base either. I was 19 and had never before been away from my family for any part of the holiday season. Needless to say, I was feeling very alone. In the branch I attended were wonderful senior missionaries who invited one of my fellow Marines and me to spend the holiday with them. We both accepted the invitation and had a very memorable holiday.

That is one of the great things about The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Through it we understand that our Heavenly Father

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works through others. He knows what we need, and the Holy Ghost can prompt someone else to help. We can also find joy in acting on the promptings we receive.

The simple act of service that was shown by two senior missionaries not only brightened a bleak holiday for me but also has motivated me to do all in my power to serve others. Ultimately, that is how we find happiness in life, whatever the season.

Elder Adam Johnson, Taiwan Taipei Mission

When I was 29, my husband died unexpectedly, leaving me a single mother with five daughters, the oldest having just turned seven. I had no idea how we would survive Christmas without my husband. It took some time to figure out how to take the “hole” out of the season and make it “whole” again. No matter what the circumstance, some basic strategies can help alleviate feelings of loneliness.

First, fatigue is a major contributor to depression, and when do we have more to do than at Christmastime? Don’t overload yourself. Know when to say no. Physical strength is essential to a

feeling of well-being. Get enough rest, skip the overabundance of sugar, eat healthy meals, and combine exercise with a good dose of sunshine.

Second, while service is an important antidote for grief, choose wisely things that are uplifting but that do not add to the chaos. In addition, don’t be afraid to let others serve you. When people ask what they can do, tell them.

Third, for a while, memories may increase your sadness, so let go of traditions that get you down. Establish new traditions or try something different each year that enriches your holidays. Make it simple. Do something that you’ll enjoy without hours of preparation. One year my daughters and I had a Christmas reading with scriptures and hymns interspersed. No rehearsals. No costumes. We just had fun and felt the Spirit.

Fourth, create an uplifting environment for yourself. Check your ward or



public library for faith-promoting DVDs. Associate with happy people.
CeLeste Mann, Texas

After much soul-searching and prayer, this is what I have learned about feeling the spirit of the holiday season:

- Happiness is not the result of receiving many gifts but of righteous living.
- Service need not be a massive project but should be of real value to the recipient.
- A cheerful spirit is contagious. Surround yourself with friends and family, as a crowd of cheerful people can soften the effect of loneliness and despair.
- Praying with thanksgiving will help remind us of the good things in life. It forces us to look outward instead of hiding inside a shell of self-pity.

James R. Osborne, Iowa

As I approach my late 20s as a single adult, the holidays become harder each year. Even though my family lives nearby, the constant barrage of holiday cards I receive from friends with pictures of their new spouses or children is enough to start a pity party for myself!

But Christmas isn’t a time to focus on ourselves—it is a time to celebrate the birth of our Savior and to cherish loved ones in our lives, both near and far. I have found that the following practices help me to avoid feeling alone during the holidays.

- **Adopting an attitude of “What can I do for others?”** There is always someone who can use a cheerful card,

PEACE THROUGH THE ATONEMENT



"The greatest of all acts in all history was the atoning sacrifice of our Savior and Redeemer.

"We remember that sacrifice at this time of year when we celebrate His birth. It is only through the atoning sacrifice of the Prince of Peace that we may know the true power of peace in our own lives."

**President James E. Faust (1920–2007),
Second Counselor in the First Presidency,
"The Power of Peace," Ensign, Dec.
2004, 5.**

• **Remembering the purpose behind the season.** Christmas can become such a busy time, but you can find peace and meaning if you make it a goal to ponder the scriptures and pray more earnestly during this time

a plate of cookies, or even a smile. Offer a ride to someone in your ward or neighborhood to see Christmas lights, invite a widow over for dinner or dessert, or donate to charity organizations. Phone calls are more affordable than ever, so use down time to catch up with family and friends. You can always find a way to brighten the life of somebody else, even if it is with a small gesture.

• **Creating and baking.** In tackling a new recipe or following the instructions of a detailed project, your mind is distracted from lonely feelings and focused on something worthwhile. You can later give your finished project to someone as a gift.

• **Re-creating favorites.** Remember things from your childhood that made the holidays unique and special. If you can't remember particular traditions, decide what is important to you and start your own holiday favorites.

of year. A trip to the temple can truly add a measure of the Spirit to your holiday. Christ is our Savior—let us all find comfort in the truth that He lives.
Erin Peer, Maryland

Christmas is a time for children and celebrating the birth of the infant King, yet since the death of my infant daughter, I have often dreaded the holiday season. One year I decided to act preemptively. Instead of worrying that the sadness would return, I made a list of activities to do throughout the season and scheduled them in advance. Having things to look forward to filled my mind with happy thoughts and pushed sad ones away.

We planned times for visiting Temple Square, making cookies, cutting our own Christmas tree, reading

special Christmas stories, and participating in other family traditions.



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As I enjoyed my other children, my husband, and the season, I found the sadness of past years never had the opportunity to catch up with me. I wasn't too busy to feel the emotions (both poignant and joyful), but I reclaimed the season as a happy time filled with activity and joy and in so doing was better prepared to cope with the tears and the laughter the season brings.

Rachel Hixson, Utah

I am elderly and live in an assisted-living center. The pace of life now means visitors come infrequently. Still, I have thought of several ways to overcome loneliness and feel joy and peace during the holiday season:

- If you are lonely, visit someone who is lonelier.
- Attend Church meetings. If you are able to drive, offer to take someone who needs a ride. While attending, offer

SHARE YOUR IDEAS

An upcoming Questions and Answers feature will focus on the following question:

I love and am grateful for my young children, but I sometimes get distracted or discouraged by the practical details of raising a family and struggle to remember what an important work it is. How can I better align gospel truths about family with my day-to-day actions and attitudes?

If you'd like to contribute your ideas and experiences, please label them "Family" and follow the submission guidelines under "Do You Have a Story to Tell?" in the contents pages at the beginning of the magazine. Please limit responses to 500 words and submit them by February 8.

to help a family with their young children or sit by someone who is lonely.

- If you are able to read, share Christmas stories with others, such as children in elementary schools or the elderly.
- Invite someone to listen to a recording of Handel's *Messiah* with you.
- Telephone someone who will be glad to hear from you.
- Invite a family with young children to bring a family home evening to you.
- Take time to write your memories of Christmases past and share them with grandchildren, other relatives, or friends. This is a gift only you can give.
- Research your ancestors to learn about how they observed the holidays. Share your findings with relatives.
- Attend the temple often.
- Write letters to missionaries. ■

Ruth Wilson Young, Utah

