



**“The Lord is close to the
broken hearted and saves
those who are crushed in
spirit.”**

— Psalm 34:18

**Do you remember how isolated many of us felt
during the COVID lockdowns?**

Days, weeks, even months went by with very little contact with other people. Perhaps you experienced some of the anxiety and loneliness that was unlike anything most of us had ever known. You and I stood in our driveways and peered at neighbours from a distance. We waved through windows. We learned to smile with our eyes from behind a mask. And when restrictions lifted, many of us emerged changed—emotionally, spiritually, and socially.

The pandemic also introduced new forms of shame. Some people felt embarrassed or anxious if they contracted the virus. Others worried they might unknowingly pass it on. Even today, signs still hang in shops encouraging us to maintain distance, to stay home if unwell, to keep each other safe. It's a gentle reminder of how deeply illness can affect not only the body but also the mind, heart, and spirit.

I still notice other signs, too—more subtle ones. Young people who missed formative years of face-to-face interaction are still rebuilding confidence and connection. Parents and teachers speak of emotional challenges that linger. Elderly friends share that the loneliness they felt during lockdown has been slow to fade, leaving gaps in their sense of belonging and wellbeing. Many people carry quiet wounds from that season of separation.

When I began working at The Leprosy Mission Australia, Melbourne was in its fifth or sixth lockdown. As I learned about leprosy—its physical effects, its social weight, its history of stigma—I found myself reflecting on my own experiences of isolation. Though COVID and leprosy are



vastly different, the emotional stress helped me understand, even in a small way, the deep impact leprosy has on individuals, families, and whole communities.

The past few years have been tough for many people around the world. For those affected by leprosy, challenges often continue over long periods of time. They may live with illness and the risk of lifelong disability. They may experience isolation and the weight of shame. Many also face ongoing uncertainty about education, employment, and acceptance within their communities.

This is the reality faced by people like Maria and her brother.

Maria's Story

Maria lives in Timor-Leste, a country where many families depend on daily labour to survive. She earns her living by chopping wood and growing vegetables to sell at the local market. Each task requires strength, balance, and careful coordination. But leprosy has damaged the nerves in her hands and feet, leaving parts of them numb. If you've ever slept on your arm and woken to that heavy, tingling numbness, you'll know how unsettling it feels to lose awareness of where your limb is. For Maria, that sensation is constant in her hands and feet. She struggles to grip her tools. She cannot feel cuts or burns. Her balance is affected. What used to be everyday tasks are now full of danger.

But she cannot stop working; her livelihood depends on it.

Maria lives with her brother, who also has leprosy. The shame and stigma he has experienced led him to isolate from others. This kind of self-imposed separation is heartbreakingly common. In many places, people with leprosy internalise stigma to the point that they hide away, convinced the world does not want them. Furthermore, with health services few and far for many people, patients with leprosy are further isolated from treatment and health professionals who understand how to treat the disease.

Maria and her brother have lived this loneliness together, unsure of how long they could keep going.

Today, you and I can change this isolation and bless people like Maria. In the region with the highest number of leprosy patients, a much-needed Health Clinic has been out of action for years. The toilet is broken. The ceiling falling in. There's little furniture. And what IS there is badly damaged. Which means people with leprosy have nowhere to turn.

Thanks to your prayers and support through Misaun Lepira Timor-Leste, Maria and her brother have now been diagnosed and begun treatment. While some nerve damage is permanent, the progression of their leprosy has been halted.

But there are more people who need this same love and care. Your prayers are needed to ensure we can raise the funds to repair and refurbish the Health Clinic in Oecusse. Pray that the refurbishment will happen on schedule so that we can bring essential

care and inclusion back to people with leprosy and other health conditions.

Pray the Government can successfully take on the running of the clinic and make an impact in the remote areas of Oecusse. This will mean distance is no longer a barrier to diagnosis and treatment, that this disease will stop spreading, and that we can prevent lifelong disability.

Not only will your prayers transform a building, it will bring a community together and transform lives.

Yours in Prayer,

Glen Coleman



**Community Engagement
Coordinator
Leprosy Mission Australia**



Will You Pray With Us?

Share your prayers for people like Maria and her brother, or for Oecusse and the work there by emailing engage@leprosymission.org.au or use the enclosed form.

Would you like to do more?

If Maria's story has moved you, consider a gift to show Love like Jesus and help provide a place of healing and care so that people like Maria and her brother don't have to suffer alone.

<https://leprosymission.org.au/ClinicChampion/ppd08>

