

## “Don’t read the comments!”



In the Internet’s vast landscape, the comments sections of articles, blogs and social media posts often become battlegrounds for the unfiltered, the unkind, and sometimes the downright cruel. While online platforms hold the promise of connection and dialogue, it is all too easy to encounter words that tear down rather than build up, that bring further polarisation and that dehumanise and debase — all reflecting some of the very worst impulses in human nature. From the other side of a screen, and sometimes the other side of the world, people seem to feel free to hurl nastiness in a way that they would never do in real life and face to face.

As often as I repeat to myself, “Don’t read the comments!” I usually can’t help myself and I find myself drawn in to a disturbing world where the unfiltered thoughts of so-called “keyboard warriors” become more and more personal and more and more nasty the further I read. I am no longer surprised by how quickly comments go from being about an issue to being incredibly personal and hurtful.

While I can moderate the comments on my own [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [YouTube](#) channels, occasionally deleting something and even more occasionally blocking someone, the comments sections of *The Courier Mail*, *The Australian* or the *ABC News* seem largely unregulated and sparsely moderated. For those of us who engage in the online space, this reality poses both a challenge and an opportunity.

Jesus' call to love our neighbours and to seek peace is as relevant online as it is in the offline world. When we read comments that are harsh, dismissive or even hateful, we are reminded of the brokenness present in all human communities. These spaces can tempt us towards cynicism or provoke us to respond in kind. Yet, as people seeking to follow the way of Christ, we are invited to bring a different spirit into our online engagement.

Firstly, we must approach the comment sections with discernment and humility. Not every voice needs to be answered, and not every debate requires our participation. Sometimes, choosing not to read or respond is an act of self-care and wisdom, protecting our own hearts from bitterness and despair.

Secondly, if we do feel called to participate, let us do so with grace. We can choose words that heal rather than harm, that invite understanding rather than escalate conflict. Practising patience, humility, and empathy in our online interactions can bear witness to the love of Christ, even in challenging spaces. It is an opportunity to model what it means to listen well, to disagree with respect, and to extend kindness, even when it is not returned.

Finally, let us hold those we encounter online in prayer. Behind every comment, no matter how hurtful or offensive, is a real person, loved by God and in need of compassion. May our engagement — whether silent or vocal — reflect the hope, peace, and reconciliation to which we are called as people of faith.

Archbishop Rowan Williams once reflected on how he managed the most difficult people he encountered — with “truth, love, patience and endless welcome,” he said. I often return to those words. On- and offline, they're not a bad way to engage in a polarised and difficult world and they give us one more way we can seek to transform the digital commons from places of division and harm into channels of grace and light.