

Don't Take My Grief Away From Me

Fourth Edition

How to Walk Through Grief and Learn to Live Again

Doug Manning



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InSight Books
A division of Funeral Director's Resource, Inc.
Edmond, Oklahoma

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Fourth Edition ©2021

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Dedication

To Ann and Jess Wade—

*The night of their great loss gave birth to this book.
This book is dedicated to them in the hope that their
honesty in grief can produce healing for all who read it.*

March 1, 1979

Preface

Don't Take My Grief Away From Me was published in 1979 as Doug Manning's first venture into offering comforting words, heartfelt understanding, and encouraging guideposts for people on the grief journey. It began his career as an author and speaker in the areas of grief and elder care and was the cornerstone of his company, InSight Books, Inc. Millions of copies have been sold all over the world in the past thirty-two years. Doug often said he would like to revisit the book and add some of the lessons learned in his years of walking with hurting individuals but just did not know how to revise a book that had worked for so many for so many years.

On September 25, 2010, Doug's wife of fifty-seven years died, and his world was significantly changed. He decided that it was time—time to update and expand this most beloved book. It was time to share some of the personal experiences and wisdom gained on his own path to healing, as well as offering stories of struggle and promise from some of the thousands of individuals who have shared their hearts with him. The title remains the same because that phrase is the foundation of all of Doug's work; people need permission and safety to grieve without it being taken away from them.

Doug's hope is that this new edition will provide fresh perspectives, gems of truth, and honest discussions about the universal experience of grief. This is his gift for anyone who shares these pages hoping to understand how to survive the pain of loss and how to ultimately find moments of gratitude and peace on their own grief journey.

For Barbara

1934-2010



*The doctor said she was gone
A few moments before
while they worked frantically to bring her back
he had said it was time for her to go
and asked me to allow her to do so
now he simply said
she is gone.*

*He was wrong
She is not here in person
and I cannot touch her
or hold her in my arms
and I know the loneliness of a house too large
with too much space to echo
the hollow sounds of silence
back to me.
But she is not gone.*

*The months have passed
and I have stopped waiting to hear her
come home from work
and the sound of her unique little shuffle
as she walked through the house
and no longer look at the bed every morning
to see if she is awake yet.
But she is not gone.*

*No one is dead until they are forgotten
And we will never forget
So she will live on
In the lives she touched
As Mother
Grandmother
Great Grandmother
Wife and friend
No way for her to be gone*



Every day we laugh at some memory
Of how frugal she was
An eraser held together by tape
More note pads than the printer
And almost as many pens as Staples
Her desk has become a shrine to remind us
How quietly she served us and never
Called it a job.
She is not gone you know.

We cry through holidays
Wishing she were here
But so grateful that she was
And that she loved us with no reservation
And no judgment
And take pictures in her honor
While wondering what to do with the thousands she took
She is still here.

She lives on in life beyond life
Whatever and wherever that is
It is a better place because she is there
And we hope
Someone makes her laugh every day
And her feet and hands feel no more pain
And that they have cameras there
So she can take pictures and
Plan to put them in albums

But mostly she lives here
In the stories we will never stop telling
The memories we will never stop sharing
The life we will never stop honoring
And the person we will never stop loving
She is not dead
She just moved to the inside of our hearts.



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*If I could do what I wanted to do for you right now,
I would make you feel normal.
I would hold your hand as you told me of the feelings
you are having inside, and I would say—
Yes, that is how it feels to be in grief.
Yes, that is a normal reaction.
Yes, as you progress through grief you
have thoughts like that.*

*I cannot be there to hold your hand and say yes.
I hope this book will be a substitute—
I hope it will let you know you are normal.*

*Grief is bad enough. To experience it and not know what
to expect or how you should feel makes the experience
worse—much worse.*

Read on and learn to feel normal.



*G*rieving is as natural as crying
when you are hurt, sleeping
when you are tired,
eating when you are hungry, or
sneezing when your nose itches.
It is nature's way of healing a
broken heart.



Chapter 1

Don't Take My Grief Away From Me

I have always thought she was brilliance under pressure. Her statement was a flash of insight in a time of darkness—a flash of insight, which ultimately changed my career and my life.

Her little girl had the croup. Nothing seemed serious or unusual about it. Eighteen-month-old children can be sick enough to scare parents to death and two hours later they seem totally well. The croup worsened and the child was admitted to the hospital. Still there was no cause for fear. An oxygen tent, a vaporizer, some antibiotics, and all would be well. The husband went home to care for the other child. In thirty minutes, the child was dead. Just dead. This beautiful, effervescent life was gone.

Of all times for me to be 700 miles away on vacation, I had to pick this time. These were members of the church where I was serving as pastor and were also dear friends. In their hour of deepest need, I was away. As little as I knew about grief then, I probably would not have been much help had I been there. I would have felt better, but I am not sure this couple would have been

helped very much by my presence or my philosophical answers.

The young mother was crying hysterically. It is strange that we cannot allow tears. Nothing is more natural than to cry. Nothing gets as quick a reaction from us as someone crying out of control. Everyone there that night began to react:

“There, there—now get hold of yourself.”

“You can't carry on like this.”

“Come on now—stop crying.”

Suddenly she stopped, stepped back, looked at them and said, “Don't take my grief from me. I deserve it. I am going to have it.”

I did not hear her make the statement, and yet her words have haunted me for years. Her words have also done more to change my concept of grief and the needs of grieving people than any words I have ever heard.

I wondered how many times I had tried to take grief away from folks. How many times I had denied them the right to grieve in my presence because it was evident that I was not comfortable with pain or tears.

I wondered how many times I had filled the air with philosophical statements designed to reassure me and to explain away tragedy far more than they were designed to help the person in grief.

I wondered how many times I had succumbed to the idea that sympathy was somehow harmful. It was almost as if I believed that if sympathy were given, people would wallow in it and never get well. These feelings seemed to be my stance.

I wondered how many times I had taken away grief by sheer neglect. When the funeral was over, my work

was done. I might have been a little more attentive the next time the person came to church; beyond that, I went on as if nothing had happened. Most of the time they appeared to go on as if nothing had happened, while inside they wept.

I wondered how many times I had taken away a person's grief by my efforts to avoid the intimacy and feelings I was forced to face in the process.

A young minister and his wife lost a child in a car wreck. They had many friends closer to them than my wife and me, yet they seemed drawn to our house. They came by night after night. When I dropped by their house, they seemed relieved and pleased. One night they told us the reason. We were the only ones willing to talk about their child. We called her by name and seemed to be comfortable in doing so. Everyone else seemed to take great pains in avoiding the subject. If the child was mentioned, the subject was changed abruptly. When they told us we were different I breathed a sigh of relief. I had stopped trying to take away grief and had begun helping people walk through it.

These experiences created so much interest in me that I started a study of grief that is still going on today. I read the few books that were available at that time and started a grief group long before they were in vogue. My passion about grief changed my life and my career. The goal of my life is to give people the freedom and the permission to grieve without someone trying to take it away.

People will try to take grief away from you also. They will not intend to, nor even realize they are doing so. You may not realize this is being done to you, but the effort will be there. The effort is subtle but very effective.

The Pattern

There seems to be a set pattern built within us that becomes our automatic reaction to grief or pain. As soon as someone shares their situation, we seem to react in three progressive ways.

First We Explain:

After years of counseling and writing, I still have to catch myself. When someone tells me their story, I want to begin explaining either why this happened or how they should feel about what happened. You may have already been bombarded with explanations. People do this because they do not know what to say and they want to make you feel better. They have no idea how foolish the explanations sound and how much anger they create.

Most of the explanations are designed to defend God, as if He needs our defense or as if we actually know how the universe works. The explanations usually start with, "Perhaps this happened because..." The young minister whose child was killed in a car crash was told, "Perhaps your child would have grown up to be a bad person and God took her home before that could happen." As horrific as that sounds, the person who said that was not an uncaring person. He was trying to help, but he saw help as explanation.

You have the right and the obligation to ask why. To question and express anger is not just a right, it is part of the healing process. But the bottom line is there really are no answers or adequate explanations to why bad things happen to us.

One of my favorite stories tells of a young student who fell asleep in seminary class, the professor stares at

him until he awakens with a start. The professor said, "Young man tell us why is there evil and suffering in the world?" The student stammered for a moment and then said, "I used to know the answer to that question, but I forgot it." The professor said, "Mark this day well, for in the history of man there have only been two people who knew the answer to that question. One was Jesus Christ, and He didn't tell us, and the other was this young man, and he forgot."

The explanations are efforts to relieve your grief, but they actually tend to trivialize it, and trivialization leaves a person feeling like no one understands how deep they hurt. They end up feeling alone with no one to walk beside them while they face the long journey of grief.

If Explanations Don't Work, Then Comes the Arguing:

You may begin to hear: "Now you can't let yourself feel that way," "That is not how you should see this loss," "This is certainly bad, but think of how much worse it could have been," or "You know your loved one is better off and that should make you feel better." The last part of that is implied rather than stated. Believe me, you will get plenty of implications in the days ahead.

Again, these people are trying to help, but they really think that changing the way you think will automatically change the way you feel. If you will just see it differently you will feel better. They do not understand that feelings do not always follow thoughts. Understanding the whys and hows of something does not always match how we feel or respond.

**If Explanations and Arguments Do Not Work,
Then They Begin to Criticize:**

I hope you never hear, “You are not trying to get well; you are just wallowing in your grief.” It is amazing how much those who have never been there know what grief is like and what you need. Almost everyone who goes through a loss has to, at some time, deal with those who think they know and, unfortunately, feel the need to tell.

All of these are efforts to take your grief away. None will work or even help. Grief is a journey to be walked, not a situation to be explained, nor a pattern to be followed. The answer is to understand the process and find the strength and the freedom to walk the path in your own unique way.

About the Author



Doug Manning

Doug's career has included minister, counselor, business executive, author and publisher. He and his wife, Barbara, were parents to four daughters and long-term caregivers to three parents.

After thirty years in the ministry, Doug began a new career in 1982 and has devoted his time to writing, counseling and leading seminars in the areas of grief and elder care. His publishing company, InSight Books, specializes in books, video and audio productions specifically designed to help people face some of the toughest challenges of life.

Doug has a warm, conversational style in which he shares insights from his various experiences. Sitting down to read a book from Doug is like having a long conversation with a good friend.

Selected Resources from InSight Books

By Doug Manning

A Journal for the Journey (Hospice Journey)

Building Memories: Planning a Meaningful Funeral

Grief's Second Mile: Beyond the First Year ***

Journey of Grief DVD (also available streaming on Amazon & Vimeo)

*Lean On Me Gently: Helping the Grieving Child**

The Power of Presence: Helping People Help People
Book or DVD

Sacred Moments: A Minister Speaks About Funerals

Special Care Series

*Thoughts for the Holidays**

Thoughts for the Lonely Nights book/journal or CD

Thoughts for the Grieving Christian book/journal or CD

Spanish: *Spanish Special Care* or *Grief Care Series* CD set

Other Resources from InSight Books

I Know Someone Who Died coloring book

by Connie Manning

*The Empty Chair: The Journey of Grief After Suicide**

by Beryl Glover

Memories Too Few: A Letter to Parents About Pregnancy

*Loss** by Kathy Manning Burns

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