

# Sacred Moments

A Minister  
Speaks  
About  
Funerals

Second Edition

Doug Manning



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The background of the cover features two lit candles in elegant glass holders. The candles are lit, with a soft glow emanating from them. They are set against a backdrop of a draped, light-colored fabric, possibly silk or satin, which creates soft folds and highlights. In the lower right corner, a single white rose is visible, adding a touch of solemnity and beauty to the scene. The overall color palette is monochromatic, using shades of gray and white.

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**Second Edition**  
**Doug Manning**

In-Sight Books, Inc.  
Oklahoma City

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**A Minister Speaks About Funerals** Second Edition

**Doug Manning**

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In-Sight Books, Inc

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*There is no moment more Sacred  
than when a Person  
Touches another Person's  
Broken and Trembling Heart  
— Doug Manning*

# A Minister Speaks About Funerals

## The Power of A Single Word

My world changed after hearing one statement from the broken heart of a mother moments after her child died. She was hysterical, as well she should have been, but the doctor and her husband were uncomfortable with her tears and told her to calm down and “get hold of herself.” She stepped back, looked at them with great defiance, and said, “Don’t take my grief away from me, I deserve it and I am going to have it.”

I was out of town that day so I did not hear her first hand but, even hearing it later, I could never get away from that statement. I realized I had spent my life as a minister trying to do just that. I was taking people’s grief away from them instead of walking with them through the pain. I thought if I could get them through the funeral without tears I had done a great job. I would do almost anything to keep them from crying. I told jokes at inappropriate times. I quoted scriptures whether they fit or not. I told them their loved one would not want them to grieve, the arrogance of that still haunts me. How did I know what their loved one wanted?

The mother’s statement also made me realize I knew nothing about grief. I had no idea how it felt, what impact it had on lives, how long it lasted, and most importantly of all, what is needed to help people through the process. From that day until this I have spent my life trying to understand grief. At first there were very limited resources so I created some of the first grief groups. I had never heard of groups at

that time, but I gathered some folks who had just suffered the death of a loved one and listened to them as they shared with one another. My education began there and, forty years later, I hope it will never end. In the process of my education and the living out of my new world I made some discoveries that I think can be vital to our ministering to those in our care.

## **Grief As a Social Problem**

To my amazement, I discovered that grief is one of our major social problems. That may sound strange or even preposterous to us. We do not think of grief in those terms. We think of grief as a period of sadness after someone dies, and see little connection between that and social problems. We have no idea how many of the things we call social problems are often caused by grief or trauma that is not properly dealt with and left to fester until it exemplifies itself in some of the things we call social problem.

We have no idea how much divorce comes from grief. There is no way to prove it statistically, but those of us who work in this area can testify to the large number of marriages that cannot live through the death of a child. Often the divorce does not happen right then, so by the time it does happen the source of the break is no longer seen as the cause.

We have no idea how much substance abuse comes from unresolved grief. There is not space here to tell just the stories from the families I have walked with through grief. Young and old, rich and poor ruined by substance abuse that could easily be traced to the trauma of a death.

In almost every one of the hoarder show now popular on reality television, the hoarding started over a loss that could not be grieved. As one man said, "After my son died, I could not even throw away a trash bag."

Grief is more than a time of sadness after a loss. Grief is a life changing tsunami that must be faced and walked through.

## **The Wounded Families and the Inept Minister**

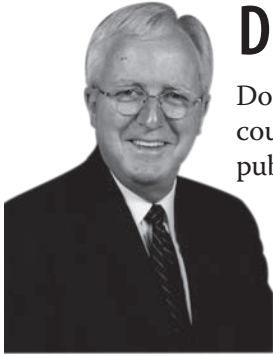
I discovered that I did not know what to say or what to do when someone faced the death of a loved one. My normal pattern was to go to the home as soon as I was called about a death. I dreaded these encounters and drove as slowly as possible to give me time to build up my courage. I would enter the room with fear and trembling and a voice that was so syrupy with worked up concern I am sure they would have laughed or wanted to throw me out if not for their situation. I would go into my routine about how they should look on the bright side and be grateful that the loved one was better off, or in heaven, or did not have to suffer anymore. Then, after laying a few scriptures on them and a quick prayer, I was gone. I might contact the family briefly in preparation for the funeral, but that usually happened a few minutes before the funeral started. I had about three funeral sermons I could cut and paste to fit everyone. My denomination did not have a prayer book or a set ritual to follow but I certainly had my own. They call those cookie cutter funerals, and I was one of the chief bakers of cookies.

Most of my message could be summed up in “Don’t grieve, your loved one is in heaven.” If the person was not a member of any church or religious group I became an expert at almost saying something; hints about heaven and skirting the rest was the norm. If a baby or child died, I could always tell them how David wept for a little while and then went to supper. I don’t know when David became the paragon of fatherhood, but he became the example of “grieve a little and go on” when you lose a child.

When the funeral was over, my work was done. I never talked to the family about the loved one again. I thought talking about it just reminded them and made it worse. I



## 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, In-Sight Books, Inc., 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 In-Sight Books, Inc.

*Don't Take My Grief Away From Me\** (113 pages)

*Lean On Me Gently: Helping the Grieving Child\** (32 pages)

*The Power of Presence: Helping People Help People* Book (120 pages)

*Share My Lonesome Valley: The Slow Grief of Long-Term Care\** (128 pages)

*Thoughts for the Grieving Christian* (144 pages)

*The Journey of Grief* DVD (66 min)

\*Available as e-books from your favorite vendor

### For a catalog or ordering information:

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