

Thoughts for the Holidays

fourth edition

finding
permission
to grieve



DOUG MANNING

A lantern with a lit candle inside, surrounded by pinecones and bokeh lights. The lantern has a star on its lid and is the central focus of the image. The background is filled with soft, out-of-focus lights, creating a warm and festive atmosphere. Pinecones are scattered around the base of the lantern, adding to the holiday theme.

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InSight Books Inc.
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*I*n the rising of the sun and
in its going down,
We remember them

In the blowing of the wind and
in the chill of winter,
We remember them

In the opening of the buds and
in the warmth of summer,
We remember them

In the rustling of leaves and
the beauty of autumn,
We remember them

In the beginning of the year and
when it ends,
We remember them

So long as we live, they too shall live,
For they are now a part of us as
We Remember Them

Thoughts for the Holidays

*Sometimes,
when one person is
missing, the whole world seems
depopulated.*
— Alphonse de Lamarline

It was all she could do to open the door and walk into the party. Her husband, Charles, had died a few months before and now she found herself going to the office Christmas party she could not find a way to avoid. Mary and Charles had built the company together and now the whole burden was on her shoulders. She did not want her grief to rob the employees of their annual party which had always been one of the highlights of the year. The employees always brought their families along so this became a time of bonding together. There were always toys for the children, good food and entertainment.

Mary could not stand the thought of attending this event, but she could not stand the idea of canceling either. The party would be a crushing reminder that Charles was no longer here and would never be here for these events. The joy the party would bring seemed to make light of his death. Laughing and having a good time seemed totally out of place and somehow wrong. Yet she drove to the party, full of dread and anger, but she went.

The first person she met as she walked in the door was her pastor. He was a fixture at these events and was always invited. He grabbed her hand and said, "Mary, the secret is to just be happy." She thought that to be one of the worst platitudes she had ever heard, but she smiled and said nothing. Then she met the pastor's

wife who said, “Mary I know this is a hard time for you, but doesn’t it give you great comfort to know that Charles will be spending this Christmas with Jesus?” Mary, the dedicated church pianist, heard herself scream “No!! He should be spending it with me.” She still blushes when she tells the story, but there is a hint of pride in her voice even as she blushes. That was exactly what she should have said.

The husband of another woman died a few months before Thanksgiving. Her children could not stand the thought of their mother being alone for that day and put so much pressure on her that she had little choice. She went to their home for Thanksgiving and had a miserable time. She had no emotions to spare on such things as gratitude and joy. It hurt to be involved in a family event when her husband could not attend. She felt almost dirty for being there and had no idea where those feelings came from. She said she would do the dishes as a way of escape into the kitchen. She forgot that the window over the sink in her daughter’s kitchen looked out on the cemetery where her husband was buried. She suddenly burst into tears and screamed, “Why did you leave me like this? How dare you do this to me?” The family overheard her and, of course, could not understand nor could she explain. The holidays had overloaded another grieving person.

The Waves of Grief

*The
ocean has its
ebbings—
so has grief*
— Proverb

Wherever you are in your grief journey, you have probably found that grief comes in waves that seem to overcome your being. You may have figured out that some of these waves are fairly predictable and seem to almost be on some hidden schedule, while others hit for no apparent reason without warning. Some people say they have been overwhelmed by a sudden wave in the grocery store or some other public place.

Most likely you have figured out that all of the special days in a year bring on a wave that starts about thirty days before the event and builds until the day arrives. The anniversaries of birth, marriage, death or other significant times seem to hit with a vengeance.

Then the Holidays Happen

Those times of great joy and family involvement now must be faced with fear and dread. Christmas, Hanukkah, Thanksgiving, Easter, Mother's Day, Father's Day, and even Valentine's Day all bring on a tidal wave of grief that must be faced and handled with care.

Why do the Holidays Hurt?

On the surface, it is hard to see how the holidays could possibly cause a problem. They are times of great happiness and, to those who have never been through grief, you look like someone who needs some cheering up and a break from your sadness. To others the holidays are family times and it always helps to be around family and friends. That never fails to bring cheer to a lonely heart so your family and friends will probably be convinced that the holidays are just what you need. They may bring great pressure upon you to join in with enthusiasm so you can get away from your grief for a time of joy. They do not understand that the holidays themselves can create some added burdens and added sorrows.

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, 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 InSight Books

A Journal for the Journey (Hospice Journey / 48 pages)

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

*Grief's Second Mile: Beyond the First Year** (48 pages)

The Journey of Grief DVD (66 min / also available streaming)

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

*Memories Too Few: A Letter to Parents about Pregnancy Loss** (32 pages)

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

Sacred Moments: A Minister Speaks About Funerals (32 pages)

Thoughts for the Lonely Nights: A Conversation About Grief (134 pages)

Thoughts for the Grieving Christian (144 pages)

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