

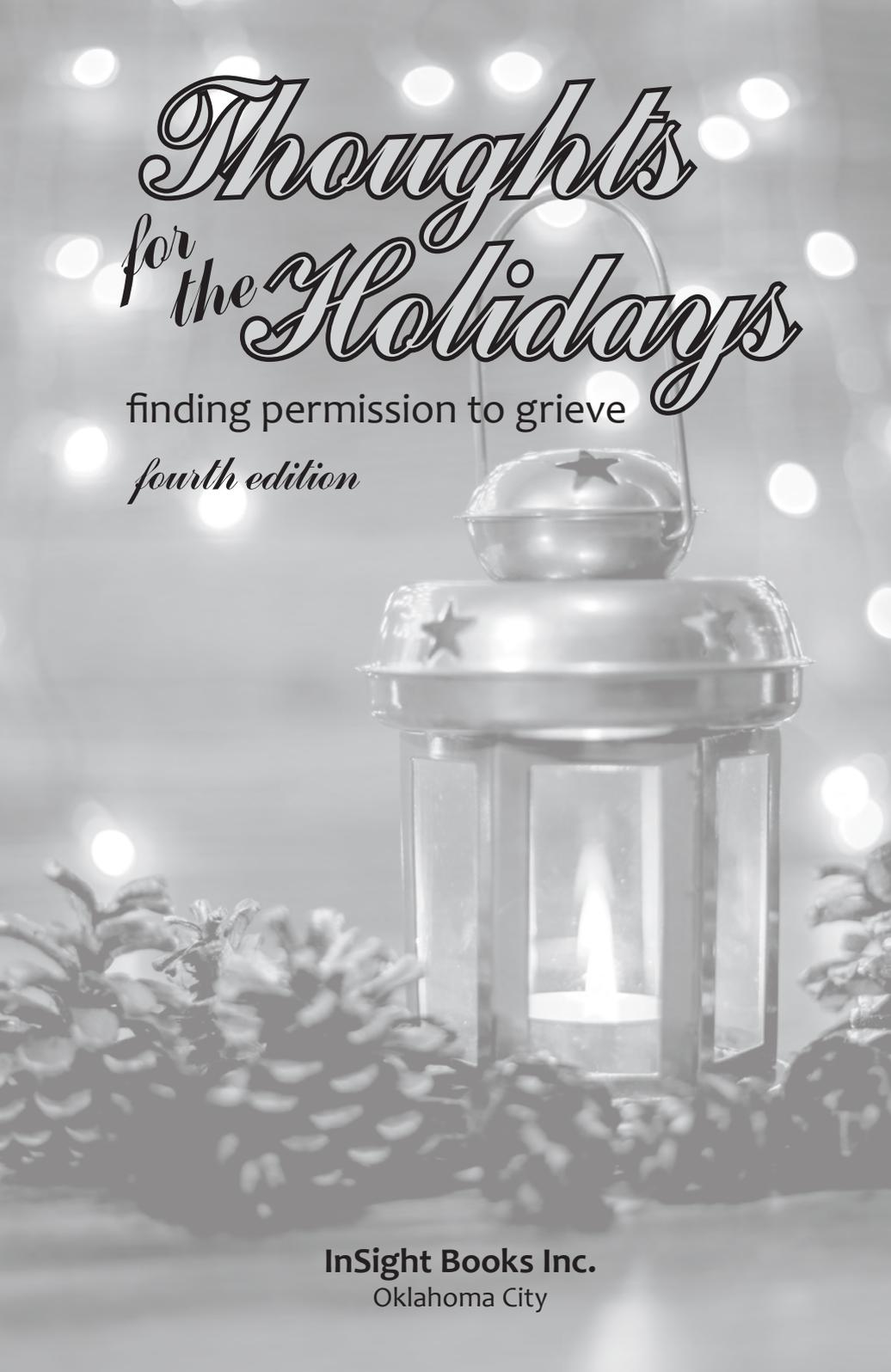
# Thoughts for the Holidays

*fourth edition*

finding  
permission  
to grieve



**DOUG MANNING**



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**InSight Books Inc.**  
Oklahoma City

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## Finding Permission to Grieve

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# 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.