



Dessert First
Readers' Guide for Lent



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Years ago, my husband and I attended a Christian spirituality conference during Lent. Fred was there for the theological and academic heft; I was there to squeeze any emotional wisdom I could from a dark, bleak season. Grief feels heavier to me during these months, which makes Lent—and its Spring transition—a difficult one.

At the beginning of the workshop, participants were invited to pick up index cards with words written on them in big, bold permanent marker. My eyes shifted to the card that read: “DOUBT.” It resonated a little too viscerally: “DOUBT”: Life, death, grief, afterlife—what did it all really mean?

I don't remember much about the content of the sessions, but I do remember holding those black letters in my palm, inked permanently on my card and on my heart. My days as an intensive care unit chaplain, where I'd sat bedside with more than 200 people as they died, had had some closure: my own parents' deaths did not. Lingering waves of grief were not so easily forgotten.

During that Lent my sadness was as deep as my doubt: Would I make it through?

I needed room to grieve.

I needed room to doubt.

Even Jesus gave Thomas room. I needed time and space to question the whys of deaths. Why do loved ones with whom we are inextricably linked get taken away from us? Where is the logic in that? Where is the fairness in losing someone who is a part of you?

No matter your situation—whether you have recently lost a loved one or continue to ride “the grief train”—this readers' guide for Lent is meant to be a companion on your wilderness journey. We invite you—or your small group, family, community—to honor *your feelings and needs* during this liturgical season of turning inward.

First Steps:

1. Acknowledge your loss and how it may/may not impact your Lenten wilderness season.
2. Acknowledge that your grief may arrive in “waves” this season—it may come and go, triggered by memories, places, rituals, traditions.
3. Stay in your grief; it's OK to question and doubt the *why* of all of this. Lent is a time of deep introspection; Jesus would expect nothing less.



Using *Dessert First* as an Individual Reader during Lent:

You are invited to embrace Lent's conduciveness to quiet time in order to reflect, remember, journal about your personal grief experience as it corresponds to Christ's wilderness journey. Honor your feelings and needs and feelings. The following chapters and resources have a focus on coping with the death of a loved one and subsequent grief:

Introduction: We're All Terminal

Chapter Six: Let's Talk about Death

Epilogue: Dessert First

Resource 7: Anticipating, Acknowledging, and Grieving Your Loss

Resource 9: Quotes and Scripture Passages about Death and Loss

Using *Dessert First* in Small Group Settings:

You may choose and honor your loved one by studying and reading *Dessert First* together during Lent. If you determine you'd like to use it as a group, be sure to consider that individuals within the group may have a *different* grief experience as everyone walks toward Holy Week. Make a brave and safe space for everyone's feelings and needs.

Reflection and Discussion Questions for Individuals, Families, and/or Groups:

Study each question in depth during the six weeks of Lent. Discuss your reflections, journal on your own, and/or practice active listening to yourself and others:

1. Lent begins with Ash Wednesday, which is about death. Consider your own death this day and all throughout Lent. Are you prepared? Why or why not? How might *Dessert First* inch you closer toward thinking deeply about the shared end all humans have in common?
2. What do you need this Lent as it relates to your grief and/or spirituality? Make a list of needs and corresponding intentions.
3. What do you anticipate will be *most* difficult this Lent? Consider how this journey might trigger a difficult season for others to connect to your deceased loved one.
4. Study the wilderness scriptures following Jesus' baptism: What does Jesus' 40-day journey in the desert teach Jesus—and us—about life and death? How does the modern Lenten journey mirror a grief journey?



5. Do you think Jesus felt grief as he entered the wilderness, his ministry, or Holy Week? Why or why not? Explore this idea.
6. During his overall ministry, revisit what Christ taught his students about life, death, and grief. What have you learned this Lent about Christ's (and Christianity's) view of life, death, and grief? Revisit question 1—how has this journey of paying attention to death and grief during Lent helped you in your own journey of bereavement and considering your own end of life?

Summary:

Grief is real and can be especially strong during the winter season and Lent. Continue to pay attention to your feelings and needs all throughout the season, as they may shift day to day, hour to hour. The important part is that you check in with yourself, practice the best self-care you can, and set clear expectations with others.

Please note that for bulk, group orders of 20 or more, author J. Dana Trent is available for Skype Q&As! Learn more about that and bulk orders at www.chalicepress.com/DessertFirst.

Let Dana know how you and/or your group used Dessert First. Share your individual and group experiences, thoughts, reflections, questions, and comments with her on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [Instagram](#).

