



THE
Desert Walk

A Journey Through Lent with Jesus

Leslie Albizzatti



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CATHOLIC.
PASTORAL.
TRUSTED.

I would describe Leslie as a spiritual midwife and prayer warrior. I begin with that because I've experienced firsthand her closeness with the Lord. I trust her prayer and discernment, and, because of that, I trust her as a guide through the desert that is Lent. The meditations in this book echo the timeless spiritual classic *He and I* in the way Leslie vulnerably shares her conversations and encounters with Jesus. In doing so, she not only allows the reader to witness the beauty of a relationship with God but also invites them to go deeper into their own walk with the Lord.

—Sarah Kroger, Catholic singer/songwriter

The Desert Walk is a beautifully written gem that offers much-needed hydration for the parched, distracted, noise-saturated, and weary soul. Against the backdrop of the desert's stark and sacred landscape, Leslie invites us to journey with her through forty days of honest, intimate, and challenging reflections—drawing us into the heart of Lent and, more deeply, into the heart of Jesus.

This Lenten companion not only offers a rich banquet to feast upon—Sacred Scripture, the wisdom of the saints, and the insights of spiritual masters—but also gently teaches us how to engage the imagination, linger and wrestle in prayer, and vulnerably open our hearts to a fresh and transforming encounter with Jesus. Clearly, Leslie lives and prays under the influence of Jesus. *The Desert Walk* is not just an invaluable companion for Lent, but a soul-nourishing guide for any season.

—Mary Guilfoyle, ACTS XXIX missionary / leadership team

It's physical, this journey through Lent offered by Leslie Albizzatti. Jesus is tangibly with us every step of our journey. We feel his gaze even when we are silent together. We walk a long way, up hills and down again, feeling desert sands and then resting at the base of a cliff. All the while, Jesus coaxes us into the desert, knowing the interior treasures that await us there. Sometimes, he speaks, but usually he quietly awaits our initiative. Jesus lifts our chins, looks into our eyes and hearts, and speaks strong, encouraging words to Lenten pilgrims through this book.

—Fr. Tim Hepburn, pastor, St. Michael Church, Gainesville, Georgia

Any journey with Jesus is worth taking. Leslie gracefully invites each of us to leave behind our comfort and complacency, drawing closer to Jesus and following him on a journey that reveals not only more of him but also more of our own hearts. With humility, gentleness, and honesty, Leslie assures us that we can find him on *The Desert Walk*. The question is, will you come—will you follow where he leads? I'm certain you won't be disappointed if you say "yes."

—Sarah Kaczmarek, director of pastoral ministry, Encounter Ministries

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Preface

In the weeks leading up to Lent, I began asking the Lord what Lent would look like this year: “Lord, how do you want me to walk through this season?” As I prayed, nothing immediately came to the forefront. After repeating this same prayer daily, the answer finally arrived on Ash Wednesday.

My Lenten practices have varied over the years, but one thing they all had in common was privacy. Whether I was giving something up or adding a new spiritual discipline for forty days, my practices were personal, and I held them in secret. No one knew about my Lenten practices except those with whom I chose to share them.

In the dawn hour of Ash Wednesday, I began my prayer time with the Lord: “Lord, it’s the start of Lent, and I’m not sure what you would like this season to look like. I’m not hearing anything.” And then, I heard him speak to my heart.

In my prayerful conversation with the Lord, I sensed his gentle voice saying to me, “Write every morning for the next forty days about our time in the desert and share it.”

I replied, “Well, now, let’s talk about this, Jesus. I can meet you in the morning, walk with you in the desert, and write about our time together. But share it? I don’t think so!” As a social introvert, I like people, but I also like my quiet, hidden interior life, which matches my private nature. I met Jesus’ invitation to share my journey with him with some resistance.

“You’ve got the wrong girl! I can’t do this,” I flatly told him. We’ve had these kinds of discussions before, Jesus and me. He asks, and I feel inadequate, full of doubt and uncertainty. Surely, he could find someone more qualified for the task, someone with knowledge and expertise. Yet, he didn’t ask someone else. And, although I hemmed and hawed, pushed back, and bargained with Jesus, no matter how daunting and intimidating it felt, I acquiesced to what he had asked of me.

You see, Jesus knows me very well. He knows every one of us very well. If I had known too far ahead of time what the Lord had in store for me, I would have experienced more unnecessary worry, stress, balking, and resisting—of which there certainly was some.

Writing for forty days (excluding Sundays) and sharing it with others on a blog felt like an overwhelming project that would, more importantly, make me too vulnerable for my liking. Figuratively standing, exposed and naked, in front of a crowd is not something I seek, ever. Then again, Jesus never asks anything of us that he hasn’t already experienced.

The Desert Walk is based not only on my forty-day Lenten experience—a healing journey that continues today—but also on my prayer life, Scripture meditations, countless journal

entries, and years of friendship with Jesus. In writing this book, I hope the daily meditations in the desert will lead you to a more profound friendship with our Lord. May the Holy Spirit guide you and highlight areas for spiritual growth, healing, and transformation. Walking intimately with Jesus and opening our hearts to him changes everything.

I pray that *The Desert Walk* draws you deeper into the heart of our Lord.

“[Jesus] said to them, ‘Come, and you will see’” (John 1:39).

Introduction

Why the Desert?

I can never remember if the word “desert” has one “s” or two. Then, I remember that the word with two is much more appealing. The desert doesn’t always evoke visions of beauty or excitement, yet there is an allure to this dry, dusty, rocky, and sandy place that has a peculiar beauty of its own. I am often struck by how much life exists in the desert. It appears so desolate at first glance, but a closer look reveals something more. The same is true of our spiritual practice in Lent. What at first seems to be a season for sacrifice and discipline may, in fact, be a time for exposing hidden graces and interior treasures.

While there are undoubtedly many picturesque locations that can help foster a deep connection with the Lord and prepare us for Easter, the desert, with its stark beauty and hidden life, invites us to explore and discover new depths of our faith, offering us a unique experience unlike any other time of the year. Stepping into the desert’s silence during Lent can be a much-needed respite from the clamor and chaos of the world. We all yearn for peace and silence, whether we’re aware of it or not. The quiet moments spent with the Lord can bring healing and restoration, soothing our concerns, discontent, and pain.

Our Lord’s Voice in the Stillness

As I contemplate the desert for Lent, three characteristics come to mind: the scenery, the silence, and the shelter.

First, the barren scenery of the desert makes it a place of austerity. It offers few disturbances, which is a tremendous blessing during Lent. Focusing on the Lord is easier when we don’t allow ourselves to be consumed by diversion and distraction.

Second, the desert is a place of profound silence. In this silence, God’s voice becomes clearer. The world’s constant buzz can often drown out his whispers, making it difficult to hear him. But in the solitude of the desert, in the quiet of our hearts, we can more readily hear his voice. As the Lord beckons us into the desert, into the stillness, he invites us to listen to his voice above all others.

Third, as a nature lover, I think about the extreme climate in the desert, where Jesus spent forty days and nights exposed to severe conditions. Where does one find refuge from the harsh elements? Shelter is sparse in this type of terrain. There are no shade trees and few natural hiding places. A journey into the desert leaves us vulnerable and asks that our authentic selves step forward. We will need to find shelter not in a place, but in the person of Jesus Christ.

The Format

There are forty reflections in this book: one for each day of Lent, from Ash Wednesday to Holy Saturday, and a final reflection on Easter Sunday. Each day begins with a quote, followed by the daily theme, a Scripture verse for meditation, and a few questions for journaling. The time for each reflection may average between 15 and 30 minutes, or more if desired. Sundays are for rest on the Lord's Day; the Sunday gospel verses provided are for pondering the goodness of the Lord.

This is your time with Jesus. If he takes you in a completely different direction instead of the theme for the day, follow it. He will reveal exactly what you need for that day. *The Desert Walk* is merely a guide to help you connect with your heart and his.

The Desert Walk is a sacred pathway that takes you through a prayer experience with Jesus, a progression to move from an outer spiritual life of doing and performing to an interior life of abiding and being in communion with the Lord. Simply put, it is moving from busyness to stillness and from the head to the heart.

Contemplative prayer and imaginative prayer are powerful tools to encounter the living Christ; they foster a deeper interior life. This journey of prayer begins with quiet time for listening, getting in touch with the senses, and envisioning the Lord's presence. With time, this type of prayer can yield beautiful fruit.

Journaling can also be a key component of prayer. Writing thoughts, feelings, prayers, inspirations, and sensory impressions help us internalize what we are experiencing through the visual practice of seeing those thoughts and feelings in writing. Journaling can be sentences or pages long, or it can be simply a list of words and bullet points. It can be sketches or abstract drawings. The idea is to put pen to paper and let the Holy Spirit work through your body, mind, and spirit.

Lent is a precious gift: a time to pray, reflect, look inward, and draw closer to Christ. It is a special season in the life of the Church dedicated to preparing ourselves spiritually for Easter. This journey encourages us to focus and walk intentionally with Jesus through the Lenten desert, sharing in his passion and cross, and ultimately celebrating his glorious resurrection on Easter Sunday.

Join me in accepting this invitation into the Lenten desert—a silent, peaceful place with few distractions, where you can be in the company of Jesus to hear his voice and connect deeply with his heart. Although the desert may initially appear as a lonely, arid landscape, it gradually reveals its abundant beauty as we follow Jesus and cultivate a profound friendship with him.

"I will lead her into the wilderness and speak persuasively to her" (Hosea 2:16b).

Introduction to *Spiritual Journaling*

1. What Is Spiritual Journaling?

At its heart, spiritual journaling is the practice of writing to deepen your relationship with God. It's not merely about putting words on a page, but engaging your mind, heart, and soul in response to God's presence and revelation in your life. Through reflection, prayerful writing, and honesty, you create space for God to speak and for you to listen, remember, and respond.

For centuries, spiritual seekers—from biblical figures to modern-day saints—have written down their prayers, struggles, questions, insights, and hopes. This practice helps us integrate what we hear, learn, and experience into our faith journey.

Think of your journal as a sacred space on paper—one that no one else needs to see but God and you. It is a place where you can be real, vulnerable, and authentic. As you write, your pen becomes a tool of prayer, and your journal becomes a record of grace. Spiritual journaling allows you to reflect on your personal experience as you begin to articulate what faith means for you. The intention is not academic mastery, but transformation. By writing regularly, you allow the Holy Spirit to work deeply and personally in you.

2. Who Is This Book For?

Whether you are brand-new to the faith or longing to grow in your spiritual life, this book, with its thought-provoking journal prompts, welcomes you as you are. You don't need to be a skilled writer or a theologian. All you need is to be open to letting God meet you on these pages.

3. Theological Foundations for Journaling

Faith Seeking Understanding (St. Anselm)

The Catholic faith is not just received—it is lived in. Saint Anselm described theology as “faith seeking understanding.” Journaling is one way to seek understanding—not only intellectually but also emotionally and spiritually.

The Example of the Saints

Many saints practiced spiritual journaling. Consider:

- Saint Augustine, whose *Confessions* remains one of the most profound journals of the soul ever written.
- Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, who wrote her *Story of a Soul* as a spiritual memoir filled with simple honesty and deep insight.
- Saint Alphonsus Liguori, who taught that spiritual exercises—including writing—help root us in God’s will and love.

Writing is a way of praying, thinking, and listening all at once.

4. How to Use This Sacred Pathways Book

Think of this book as a companion on *your* sacred pathway. You are free to write as much or as little as you like. What matters is that you return to it regularly.

You’ll find:

- Journaling prompts throughout this book.
- Scripture references and prayers to inspire reflection.
- Space to write freely, doodle, paste, or draw if you’d like.

Establish a rhythm:

- Read the prompt.
- Reflect quietly.
- Write from the heart. Don’t worry about grammar or form.
- Revisit your writing later for further insight.

5. Tips for Journaling Spiritually

1. Begin with prayer. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide your thoughts.
2. Be honest. This is your space. You can wrestle with questions, express doubts, and record joys.
3. Use Scripture. Let a Bible verse spark your thoughts. Many of the reflections and prompts include Scripture references.
4. Be consistent. A few lines in response to each prompt build a powerful record of your faith.
5. Review often. Flip back through previous pages. Notice how your understanding and relationship with God is growing.

6. Journaling as Transformation

Writing is not simply remembering—it is forming. It integrates:

- The mind (understanding and concepts).
- The heart (prayer and feeling).
- The will (commitment and action)

Through journaling, faith becomes more than ideas—it becomes a lived experience.

Your journal will become:

- A mirror for self-discovery.
- A repository of insights and prayers.
- A map of your spiritual journey.

In moments of dryness or doubt, you can look back and remember how God has led you thus far.

7. A Word from the Tradition

“The one who desires to be saved must continually examine the state of his soul, and journaling is a most useful exercise for such reflection.” —St. Alphonsus Liguori

The Church invites us to not just learn the faith but to live and embody it. Writing brings this invitation to life. It enables you to pause amid the rush of new information and hear what God is saying personally to you.

8. Your Journey Starts Here

Let this journaling be a space of:

- Stillness in a noisy world.
- Clarity in a confusing time.
- Faith in the midst of questions.
- Each page is a step in your walk with God.

Welcome to the journey. Welcome home.

Rev. Thomas M. Santa, CSsR
Liguori Publications

Tips to Handle Distractions

1. Keep a notebook handy or use the space provided in this book to record distractions.
2. Turn the distraction into a prayer for the person or situation that occupies your thoughts.
3. Pray 2 Corinthians 10:5: “take every thought captive in obedience to Christ.”
4. Meditate on a word or phrase—such as Jesus, Yeshua, Beloved—and keep repeating it.
Or, create your own words or phrases that help you focus on the Lord.
5. Practice breathing exercises.
6. Listen to worship music.



Day 1

The Invitation

(ASH WEDNESDAY)

“I have always loved the desert. One sits down on a desert sand dune, sees nothing, hears nothing. Yet through the silence something throbs, and gleams.”

ANTOINE DE SAINT-EXUPÉRY, *THE LITTLE PRINCE*

Standing at the edge of the Lenten desert, I am captivated by the immense and daunting landscape that unfolds before me. As far as the eye can see, there are infinite particles of sand and rock stretching endlessly into the horizon.

My wandering thoughts keep me company as I stare intensely at the sand near my feet. There is no obligation for me to step into the desert. I can choose whether to embark on this Lenten journey or not. Yet, something or someone is drawing me in. I turn around and observe the lush and tempting comforts of my complacency.

Struggling with the allure to avoid the desert journey, tension builds within me. Thoughts of worldly indulgence and self-gratification bring a fleeting sense of delight. I like the things of this good world. It is hard to leave them behind. Perhaps, I like them too much.

As the distractions fade, I'm aware of the invitation from Jesus to draw closer to him. But distractions still persist, and the present moment gives way to questions about how this journey will unfold. Will it be arduous or uncomfortable? What if nothing happens? Or what if things surface in my heart that I would rather avoid? Does everyone feel this way at the start of Lent?

The invitation awaits—a chance to journey purposefully with Jesus. Familiarity with the annual Lenten season brings forth the same apprehensions and doubts, fueled by fears of disappointment in myself and unfulfilled commitments.

Why Lent? Its purpose is clear: it is a spiritual preparation for Easter. Yet, I grapple with the discipline and sacrifices it demands. I focus more on what I might give up rather than what I could gain from this journey with the Lord. What is this telling me about myself?

The love-hate relationship with Lent is laced with uneasiness and expectation. Dread lingers, for the desert seems unwelcoming. Yet, my anticipation arises: *What will my time with Jesus bring? Do I really want to expose myself to this? What if it doesn't unfold as expected?* And so, I offer myself silent reassurance: *The only way forward is to take the plunge.*

I close my eyes, take a deep breath, and utter a prayer: “Jesus, guide me through this desert journey and open my heart to all you have in store for me.” Hesitation marks my first step, but I reach for his hand and leave behind the familiar comforts. I step into the unknown, trusting in the guiding presence of the Holy Spirit. We stand together in the sand. It is warm, gritty, and coarse beneath my feet.

Scripture

“[The LORD said,] ‘They shall not hunger or thirst; nor shall scorching wind or sun strike them; For he who pities them leads them and guides them beside springs of water.’”

ISAIAH 49:10

Reflection

1. As you take that first step into the desert, pause and tune in to your surroundings. What are you feeling? What do you sense or see around you? Let your thoughts flow freely.
2. As you consider accepting Jesus’ invitation, what hopes surface within you? Are there any hesitations or doubts that linger? Take a moment to journal your experience—be honest with yourself.
3. Visualize the encounter. Close your eyes and imagine yourself standing in the desert with Jesus by your side. What does he want to reveal to you at this moment? Allow his presence to speak to your heart.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.