

## READING AND DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR

# *A Grief Observed*

by  
C. S. Lewis

1. *A Grief Observed* contains C. S. Lewis's intimate notes about grief and feeling abandoned by God, like a door was slammed in his face and bolted shut. "Not that I am (I think) in much danger of ceasing to believe in God," he surmises. "The real danger is of coming to believe such dreadful things about Him" (p. 6). Have you ever come to a place where you asked, "Where is God?" Did you fear, as Lewis did, "coming to believe such dreadful things" about God? How did you work through it?
2. If God allows such horrendous things to occur while we're alive, under his watch, where is the confidence that such a God can be relied on once we've died and are in his presence?

3. We know that death is not the end. Lewis knows it too. But that doesn't make the path through grief easy to walk, for us or for Lewis. Has your experience of grief and loss influenced your faith? If so, how has it shaped your views of God?
4. It's interesting to point out that *A Grief Observed* was originally published under a pseudonym (N. W. Clark) and was only posthumously attributed to Lewis. Why do you think Lewis published this particular book under a pseudonym? Is it because the subject of grief is so unsettling to our relationship with people and with God that we try to hide it? Or something else? What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of approaching Lewis's experience through his intimate notes rather than in a theological analysis?
5. Through his marriage to Joy Davidman, Lewis opened a door to love and affection. After she died, he asked, "Oh God, God, why did you take such trouble to force this creature out of its shell if it is doomed to crawl back—to be sucked back—into it?" (p. 19). Why do we allow ourselves to love deeply when we know that eventually our hearts will be broken by death, distrust, or some other pain?
6. Lewis struggles with imagining Joy after her death, when she will no longer be the Joy he knew (p. 20). Have you struggled with understanding what happens after death—what we look like and who we are? If our loved ones are not in their mortal bodies, what makes them *them*?

7. At a particularly tense point in the book, Lewis questions everything, wondering if it's a big practical joke—Jesus, the cross, and the whole setup (p. 30). Why is it that religion is sometimes no help to us when we're grieving, at least not at first?
8. It's encouraging to walk with Lewis, closely knit to grief and discovering grace again, despite the questions and the wounds made by real suffering. Lewis then asks whether God is a good God or a Cosmic Sadist (p. 30). In other words, does God inflict pain for no real purpose besides some tortuous delight, or are loss and grief and trials for something more? What do you think?
9. Couldn't God just take pain away? Why doesn't he?
10. In the last chapter, Lewis admits that grief is "like a long valley, a winding valley where any bend may reveal a totally new landscape" (p. 60). What is Lewis suggesting? Does it help you to picture grief in this way? Why or why not?
11. "*Poi si torno all' eternal fontana*" ends the book. It is a quote from Dante, when Beatrice turns away from him toward the eternal fountain. This quote suggests that Lewis doesn't dismiss his grief or feel free of it, but he is more at peace with God, like Joy in her last words to the chaplain (p. 76). How can we find peace, with God and with our situation, in times of grief? Think of a difficult time you've walked through or are perhaps still experiencing. Were you able to find peace? Why or why not?

12. The end of the book is like the beginning, if only in the questions it doesn't answer and the doubts that are still raised by the horrible occurrences of this world. How comfortable are you with the uncertainties that Lewis still has? Do you wish he had wrapped it up neatly, or do you take comfort in where he lands at the end?
13. C. S. Lewis's *The Problem of Pain* is a theological treatise on why pain exists and what God is attempting to do through suffering. *A Grief Observed* is the raw reality of Lewis's experiencing intense pain himself. If you've read both books, how would you describe the ways that each book helped you understand loss, grief, and pain?