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Teacher's Edition  
**WALKING  
TO WISDOM**

LITERATURE GUIDE SERIES

**The Screwtape Letters**

C.S. Lewis



by Kelly Warner



*Inklings* Collection



*Walking to Wisdom Literature Guide: The Screwtape Letters, Teacher's Edition*

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Version 1.0

ISBN: 978-1-60051-239-1

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Classical Academic Press  
2151 Market Street  
Camp Hill, PA 17011

[www.ClassicalAcademicPress.com](http://www.ClassicalAcademicPress.com)

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# WALKING TO WISDOM LITERATURE GUIDE: *THE SCREWTAPE LETTERS*

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# INTRODUCTION TO STUDENTS

## *Dear Students,*

We are excited that you have the privilege of reading *The Screwtape Letters* alongside a mentor (the writer of this guide) who will lead you “further up and further in” (C.S. Lewis’s words in *The Last Battle*). We aim to give you a delightful experience with this book and, in the process, to share practices that we have learned that will help you become a good reader:

- reading carefully
- taking time to absorb a book
- paying attention to details as well as to great ideas over the whole book
- learning to mark up a book
- taking a few notes while reading
- learning to ask and answer good questions
- synthesizing those questions together in a piece of writing or an engaging project

If you spend a year doing all of the Inklings courses, you will not only collect some of the most important books and thoughts, but you will also have increased your abilities and pleasures as a reader.

C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, and Dorothy Sayers (three members of the Inklings whose work you will study in the Walking to Wisdom Literature Guides: The Inklings Collection) wrote nonfiction as well as fiction, and we begin your reading of fiction with a few select nonfiction essays they wrote on topics that overlap with the topics in the book you are reading. Part of their remarkable legacy is that they wrote about many of the same great ideas in stories, plays, poems, and nonfiction essays. This means that reading the ideas without the stories in these nonfiction works, or “context essays,” will be a significant help to you in understanding them and in fully exploring the characters, plot, and imagery. American writer Flannery O’Connor said, “Our response to life is different if we have been taught only a definition of faith than if we have trembled with Abraham as he held a knife over Isaac.” This is what stories do—they give us an experience of certain knowledge, which is why how we feel about the book is part of what the book is teaching us. We have kept these things in heart and mind while making this guide for you.

We have suggested two reading schedules—one that gives eleven days to study the book and the other that gives twenty-one days. Feel free to double that or add extra time for writing and enrichment activities (found at the end of the book). Your teacher will know what is best for your schedule. We have provided you with some space for answering questions, but we recommend that you also keep your thoughts, notes, and musings in a three-ring binder (or on the computer). For the Life Questions, you may want to keep a separate journal for meditative contemplation. We would like you to have as much room as you need, because you will find that the Inklings writers require a lot of space! It is highly recommended that you look up unfamiliar words found in C.S. Lewis’s *The Screwtape Letters*, and keep a journal of these new vocabulary words and definitions as you work through the book and the guide.

You have the option of studying one guide or a few, or taking a year to study them all to fulfill your British literature requirement for high school English. Enjoy the study!

# INTRODUCTION TO TEACHERS

## *Dear Teacher,*

An editor and a writer, both teachers, worked together to create the Walking to Wisdom Literature Guides: The Inklings Collection. Both of us grew up loving the books featured in these guides, but we have also had the chance to study them academically and to teach them. After teaching them for a number of years at various levels, we became aware of the repeating themes and deeply shared concerns of these writers. It is truly remarkable that they had such commonality, given that their interests were not only vastly different, but even opposed to the governing literary interests of their own period (modernist). Two Inklings, J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis, attended Oxford as students, and also taught there (and met there); several members exchanged letters (collected in volumes); they encouraged one another's work; they were all writing both nonfiction and fiction as well as scholarly work and poetry. This is highly unusual. Many writers write in only one genre, and if they do cross genres, they do not tackle the same ideas there. Tolkien, Sayers, and Lewis all wrote down their ideas in both fiction and nonfiction. This is why we have included essays by Lewis and Sayers, as well as fiction. The fiction includes dramatic literature, short fiction, long fiction, epistolary satire, and allegory. We strongly encourage you to take the year and use this course as a twentieth-century British literature course. If you don't have the time for that, teaching through one guide will tide you over until you can invest more time.

The guides share a similar style and elements, though these are slightly tailored to the literature itself. For instance, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and the *The Man Born to Be King* are slightly different in their goals, means, and materials; hence we have tweaked the template slightly according to the book we are studying. We have, in our teaching method, instructed students in taking notes in their books, keeping notes (quotes and page numbers) book-wide on the themes and motifs, answering reading questions (which help them to pay attention to important particulars as they read), and answering discussion questions which tend toward more thematic material. We have taught them to create their own questions, to memorize important quotations, and to write essays after thoroughly digging into the book throughout the course. We have encouraged creative enrichment activities for individuals and groups. Sometimes we cross-reference other books in the Walking to Wisdom Literature Guides: The Inklings Collection in sidebar comments. So you'll see that we believe we are teaching, through these guides, how to read both carefully and syntopically, how to think and make connections, and how to write. But we are also concerned that these books would impact the way your students live—their virtue not only as students, but as human beings.

## Modify the Workload

As you approach the questions and assignments, please keep in mind that we have tried to supply you with all you need, but **you are always free to modify or reduce the workload according to the level of your students** or the amount of time that you have to spend on these books. You may reduce the number of questions they answer, and you have the final say on whether they answer orally or in writing. You also are free to assign final projects that fit your needs.

## Adapt Your Expectations

**We expect your students' answers to these questions to be far less developed than ours, but we also believe that they will be educated critically as they read ours.** Hence we see the process of answering the questions and reading our answers as educative. You will probably need to encourage them and to make your expectations clear in terms of how long and developed their answers should be. These expectations will vary according to the level of your students. We wrote these literature guides hoping that students as young as seventh grade and as old as twelfth grade would equally benefit, but **the level of your students will require you to adapt your expectations accordingly.**

We have designed these guides with several types of questions. There are reading questions for which answers will certainly be written down as a kind of accountability for students. There are discussion questions which may well only be entertained in conversation, but for which you may also want to sometimes require a written answer as a way of observing what students can build and synthesize on their own in answer to one of these more complex and thorough questions. We have allowed space after discussion questions for students to take some notes and record bullet points and page numbers as they prepare for a discussion of these subjects. We encourage you to require them to be prepared so that they are ready to contribute to fruitful discussions. Also, while students have been given space in the books to respond to questions, they are encouraged to keep a three-ring binder (or to use the computer) to take notes and muse on the material. They are also encouraged to keep a journal of their responses to the Life Questions for use in meditative contemplation and a journal of new vocabulary words and definitions.

### Adjust the Schedule

We have suggested two versions of a daily reading schedule for your convenience only. **Please feel free to adapt the schedule to your students as well.**

We recommend the following Scope and Sequence for the Walking to Wisdom Literature Guides: The Inklings Collection, though you may tailor the order of your reading to your needs and curriculum. Please note that C.S. Lewis read Sayers's play cycle *The Man Born to Be King* each year for the Lenten season.





# SCOPE AND SEQUENCE FOR THE WALKING TO WISDOM LITERATURE GUIDES: THE INKLINGS COLLECTION

## C.S. Lewis

Context Essays (selections from these are read at the beginning of each guide): excerpts from *Mere Christianity*,<sup>1</sup> *The Weight of Glory*,<sup>2</sup> *On Stories: And Other Essays on Literature*,<sup>3</sup> and “Theology in Stories” by Gilbert Meilaender<sup>4</sup>

- *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*<sup>5</sup>
- *The Last Battle*<sup>6</sup>
- *The Screwtape Letters*<sup>7</sup>
- *Till We Have Faces*<sup>8</sup>

## Dorothy Sayers

Context Essays: excerpts from *Letters to a Diminished Church*<sup>9</sup>

*The Man Born to Be King* (twelve-play cycle integrating the four gospels)<sup>10</sup>

## J.R.R. Tolkien

- *The Fellowship of the Ring*<sup>11</sup>
- *The Two Towers*<sup>12</sup>
- *The Return of the King*<sup>13</sup>

- 
1. The Walking to Wisdom Literature Guides: The Inklings Collection is keyed to the following editions listed in these footnotes: C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperOne, 2009).
  2. C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory* (New York: HarperOne, 2009).
  3. C.S. Lewis, *On Stories: And Other Essays on Literature* (San Diego: Harcourt Books, 1966).
  4. Gilbert Meilaender, “Theology in Stories: C.S. Lewis and the Narrative Quality of Experience,” *Word and World* 1/3 (1981): 222, <[http://wordandworld.luthersem.edu/content/pdfs/1-3\\_Experience/1-3\\_Meilaender.pdf](http://wordandworld.luthersem.edu/content/pdfs/1-3_Experience/1-3_Meilaender.pdf)>.
  5. C.S. Lewis, *The Chronicles of Narnia* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001).
  6. Lewis, *Chronicles*.
  7. C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (New York: HarperOne, 2009).
  8. C.S. Lewis, *Till We Have Faces* (Orlando, FL: Harcourt, Brace, & Co., 1980).
  9. Dorothy Sayers, *Letters to a Diminished Church* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2004).
  10. Dorothy Sayers, *The Man Born to Be King: A Play-Cycle on the Life of Our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, Written for Broadcasting* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1943). Reprinted with permission by Classical Academic Press, 2014.
  11. J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2005).
  12. J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Two Towers* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2005).
  13. J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Return of the King* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2005).

## THE INKLINGS

The Inklings was an informal literary discussion group associated with the University of Oxford, England, for nearly two decades between the early 1930s and late 1949.<sup>1</sup> The Inklings were writers, including C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, Dorothy Sayers, and Charles Williams, who shared a love of similar stories and a remarkable commitment to ideas they shared. Their literary philosophies tended to depart from the period in which they were writing (modernist, 1900–1950) as did their cultural values. They liked to walk together and meet regularly to read their work aloud to one another.

“Properly speaking,” wrote Warren Lewis (brother of C.S.), “the Inklings was neither a club nor a literary society, though it partook of the nature of both. There were no rules, officers, agendas, or formal elections.”<sup>2</sup> While Dorothy Sayers did not attend the meetings herself, partly because she didn’t live in the same town or teach at Oxford, she is often claimed as an Inklings, as a friend of Lewis and Charles Williams. Her correspondence with both was avid and their work concerned with many of the same subjects, characters, and plots. They were a great encouragement to one other. Lewis even read Sayers’s play cycle, *The Man Born to Be King* (which is included in our literature guide series), each year during the Lenten period.

Readings and discussions of the members’ unfinished works were the principal purposes of meetings. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*, Lewis’s *Out of the Silent Planet*, and Williams’s *All Hallows’ Eve* were among the first novels the Inklings read to one another. Tolkien’s fictional Notion Club (see *Sauron Defeated*) was based on the Inklings. Meetings were not all serious; the Inklings amused themselves by having competitions to see who could read notoriously bad prose for the longest without laughing.<sup>3</sup>

Until late 1949, Inklings readings and discussions usually occurred during Thursday evenings in C.S. Lewis’s college rooms at Magdalen College. The Inklings and friends were also known to gather informally on Tuesdays at midday at a local public house, The Eagle and Child.

We hope that you will keep the spirit of the Inklings alive in your own study of this guide by working out your own responses to their work in community and conversation as well as laboring over your writing and sharing it with fellow travelers seeking to walk a similar path. Consider studying this course online at Scholé Academy ([classicalacademicpress.com/online-courses/](http://classicalacademicpress.com/online-courses/)).

- 
1. Clyde S. Kilby and Marjorie Lamp Mead, eds., *Brothers and Friends: The Diaries of Major Warren Hamilton Lewis* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1982), 230.
  2. Bruce L. Edwards, *Apologist, Philosopher, and Theologian*, vol. 3 of *C.S. Lewis: Life, Works, and Legacy* (Westport, CT: Praegar, 2007), 279.
  3. “War of Words over World’s Worst Writer,” *Culture Northern Ireland*, May 9, 2008, <<http://www.culturenorthernireland.org/article/1739/war-of-words-over-world-s-worst-writer?search=inklings&rpg=1>>.

# DAILY READING OUTLINES FOR C.S. LEWIS'S *THE SCREWTAPE LETTERS*

## Schedule 1<sup>A</sup>

This schedule allows you to finish the book quickly. However, you will need significant time each day to devote to this heavier workload. This schedule also allows you to spend more time on final theme essays and enrichment activities when you finish the book.

Day 1: Context essay excerpts from *Mere Christianity*: “Charity” (Book III, chapter 9); “The Great Sin” (Book III, chapter 8); “Faith” (Book III, chapter 11).

Day 2: Context essay excerpts from *Mere Christianity*: “The Invasion” (Book II, chapter 2); “Time and Beyond Time” (Book IV, chapter 3)

Day 3: Preface; Chapters 1–3

Day 4: Chapters 4–7

Day 5: Chapters 8–11

Day 6: Chapters 12–16

Day 7: Chapters 17–20

Day 8: Chapters 21–25

Day 9: Chapters 26–27

Day 10: Chapters 28–31

Day 11: *Screwtape Proposes a Toast*

## Schedule 2

This schedule allows you more time to engage with the book as you read. You can spend more time on developing short answers to discussion questions, journal responses to life questions, or entries in a vocabulary journal. This schedule also allows more flexibility in time devoted daily to this assignment. Your teacher may give you still more time by adding a day or two to each segment.

Days 1–2: Context essay excerpts from *Mere Christianity*: “Charity” (Book III, chapter 9); “The Great Sin” (Book III, chapter 8); “Faith” (Book III, chapter 11)

Days 3–4: Context essay excerpts from *Mere Christianity*: “The Invasion” (Book II, chapter 2); “Time and Beyond Time” (Book IV, chapter 3)

Days 5–6: Preface; Chapters 1–3

Days 7–8: Chapters 4–7

Days 9–10: Chapters 8–11

Days 11–12: Chapters 12–16

Days 13–14: Chapters 17–20

Days 15–16: Chapters 21–25

Days 17–18: Chapters 26–27

Days 19–20: Chapters 28–31

Day 21: *Screwtape Proposes a Toast*

<sup>A</sup>While we have estimated the reading time in several schedules to the best of our ability, student reading speeds and classroom goals will differ. The amount of time you will need to complete the writing and discussion work of the literature guides alongside the reading will likely double the amount of time you use. This will vary according to the goals of the teacher and the development of the students.

# ELEMENTS IN THE LITERATURE GUIDE

## Make Notes: Possess the Book

Becoming a reader is all about learning to pay attention and gather the details to relish and realize the significance and unity of what you are reading. Try using the following symbols or making up your own system that covers the same basics. Underline interesting passages. Write in the margins so that you can go back to reference what you wrote to make your Great Ideas Quotes pages, answer questions, hold discussions, and support points you make in your writing assignments. Here is a simple marking system that we have found effective:

- \* This is important or delightful.
- ? I have a question.
- ?? I'm confused.
- ! This is surprising or exciting to me.
- T This could relate to one of the themes or motifs of the book.
- ✓ This relates to something else I have read.
- X This is part of the conflict or the problem of the story.
- C This is significant in defining this character.

## Tracing the Great Ideas

As you read, choose quotes related to the following great ideas topics (or themes) so that you can trace them all the way through the book. (Please remember that you are welcome to find your own great ideas themes in addition to ours.) Then be on the lookout for how they are worked out in each particular context. Some chapters may contain quotes relating to only one great ideas topic or to several topics. Write the quotes on the Great Ideas Quotes pages. (See page 8 for an example of how to record the quotations.) At the end of the guide you will reflect upon the themes of the course and choose one from which you will develop an argumentative essay. You may use our great idea definition for your essay's thesis or create a thesis of your own.

### Great Ideas

**Real pleasure:** As God's invention, real pleasure serves God's purpose to replace lies with the truth of God's love for us as individuals and bring us into relationship with Him; pleasure brings us self-knowledge and humility, two conditions for coming into relationship with God.

**Evil/Twisting of the good:** Satan succeeds in seducing our souls only when he can deceive us to accept a lesser substitute of what God has already graciously given.

**Relationships:** Screwtape understands the important role relationships play in the patient's life and works to undermine the patient's faith through relationships.

**Time:** Lewis illustrates his theory about God's perspective on time through the metaphor of a writer and his book.

**Gradual road to hell:** C.S. Lewis argues that the most common and dangerous way for a person to wind up in hell is through small steps of disobedience, which she commits without any serious consideration of the consequences.

**Emotion and faith:** Lewis argues that the changing nature and power of emotions can become a stumbling block for Christians, or can teach us to persevere through the peaks and troughs of our feelings.

**Individual soul:** Lewis presents God as chiefly concerned with individual people, over and against nations, and committed to individuals becoming the fullest version of themselves.

## More background

The two truths that undergird C.S. Lewis’s perspective on life are that individuals were created to be in relationship with God, and that the human soul exists for eternity. Lewis portrays Screwtape’s equal awareness of these truths and characterizes him as desperate to destroy any person’s relationship with God to ruin her eternal existence and union with God.

## Tell It Back

The method of narrating the chapters orally, or “telling it back,” is a wonderful way to sum up the content of each chapter—with or without partners. You can even act out a chapter. This is a basic element of learning to read which never loses its delight and capacity to delight others. It also helps to develop a strong mental outlining ability. After each day’s reading do an oral summary on a recording device or to another human being. If you are in a classroom setting, this is nicely done in groups where students coordinate what material they will share, in what sequence and in what amount of time. It should be a summary, hence shorter than it took to read it.

## Reading Questions

Reading questions encourage close reading of the text by asking comprehension questions. All answers are found in the text.

## Discussion Questions

Discussion questions require you to synthesize the main ideas of the text that may be either explicitly or implicitly stated. Your answers to these should explain Lewis’s perspective, not your own. Depending on your level, learning needs, or preference, the in-depth discussion questions may be written as short answers (one to two paragraphs), discussed with the teacher/fellow students, or simply read to inspire critical thinking.

## Life Questions—Journaling Assignment

It’s difficult to read any of C.S. Lewis’s writing without thinking about applying his ideas to your own life. *The Screwtape Letters* is no exception. After each reading section, several “life questions” help you reflect on your own personal experiences and examine your own life in light of ideas from *The Screwtape Letters*. You may write informal responses to the life questions in a separate journal.

## Write Your Own Discussion Questions

At the end of each section, create two discussion questions that you think would make for good discussion among classmates, friends, and family. These should not chiefly be questions that have a sentence-long answer, but rather questions that would stimulate a longer exchange of ideas. Use our discussion questions and life questions as guides for writing yours.

## Chapter Summaries (Optional)

(This is optional, because you have already done this in oral or illustration form for the Tell It Back section. Whether or not you do it will depend on your teacher.) After reading each assigned chapter, summarize the main thematic arguments and significant plot details in two to five sentences (ours average one hundred words). A well-written summary concisely retells the most important ideas and events of the chapter. Avoid directly quoting or simply rephrasing sentences in your summaries. This exercise will strengthen your ability to consistently identify essential information from a text and retell this information without plagiarizing. Check the chapter summaries provided in the teacher’s edition after you have attempted your own so that you can be sure you have covered the subject adequately. Summaries are also collected as an appendix in the teacher’s edition (TE).

## INTRODUCTION TO *THE SCREWTAPE LETTERS*

In his book *The Art of Loving*, Erich Fromm articulates the human dread of isolation, of separateness, and describes how people handle the dread differently—some absorb weaker wills into their own, and some attach themselves to a stronger will in a symbiotic union, making themselves part of another person who directs them, guides them, and is their life. According to Fromm, love is the only way of knowledge—in the act of giving myself I find myself, I discover myself, I discover the beloved, I discover humankind. Self-transcendence—that is rising above the limited perspective and needs of one individual—has been a quest from the beginning of philosophy and of time. Different views of God, humans, and nature offer different answers about how we achieve this.

Lewis makes this issue of self-absorption versus self-giving or love the center of his Christian understanding; in any given moment we are either living by devouring another for our own benefit or out of our own ruling passions, or we are taking something that could have been ours and giving it to another for the benefit of another. The nearly unbelievable paradox of the Christian scriptures and life and the template that Christ laid down for us is that this giving is actually a receiving. This takes the “it is better to give than to receive” idea one step further—“to give is to receive.”

Lewis demonstrates this radical idea of love and union with each other and with God in the negative in *The Screwtape Letters*. He shows the devouring nature of the fallen angels, or demonic creatures: even when they use terms of affection or endearment, the tempters are truly out for themselves only and always (even as an uncle or mentor). As the book goes on, the voice (Screwtape) becomes more menacing and more interested in absorbing the other will (Wormwood). Hell is noisy, devouring, competitive, and self-seeking, a place of separateness. (Or as Sartre says it: “Hell is the other.”) Hell is also bureaucratic and grimy, the twisting of all that is good. It lacks creativity (as evil can only twist or imitate but cannot create); it is hungry and never full. Pride, which the Church has always considered the chief vice, and which leads to or undergirds all other vices, is central to this hellish approach to others and to oneself, as well as to God (“the complete anti-God state of mind,” as Lewis calls it in *Mere Christianity*).

Lewis was absolutely insistent that nothing is automatic in life—that our will is totally involved in our direction and our eternal destiny; we participate with evil wills or with God’s will, but we always have a choice. *The Screwtape Letters* provides unique insight into the battle to influence a person’s choice. Screwtape’s advice to the younger tempter reveals how to capitalize on different circumstances to persuade someone to join his will with hell’s instead of submitting to God’s will. This submission ties in to Lewis’s discussion of the law of undulation with its troughs and peaks, as well as the matter of time. In chapter 6, Screwtape explains, “What the Enemy means by this [submitting] is primarily that he should accept with patience the tribulation which has actually been dealt out to him—the present anxiety and suspense. It is about *this* that he is to say ‘Thy will be done,’ and for the daily task of bearing *this* that the daily bread will be provided” (25). Further, in chapter 8, he explains that this daily surrendering happens under changing circumstances. Because we humans are both spirit and bodies, our experience is never completely steady but undulating. The law of undulation describes “the repeated return to a level from which they repeatedly fall back, a series of troughs and peaks . . . in every department of . . . life” (37). Screwtape explains that part of the Enemy’s (God’s) love for us is to give us perfect freedom, but this naturally involves us having to choose—to learn to believe and act even when our own animal and spiritual lives are sorely tempting us to forsake our faith (through exhaustion or loneliness). Screwtape notices:

[God even] withdraws, if not in fact, at least from their conscious experience, all those supports and incentives. He leaves the creature to stand up on its own legs—to carry out from the will alone duties which have lost all relish. It is during such trough periods, much more than during the peak periods, that it is growing into the sort of creature He wants it to be. Hence the prayers offered in the state of dryness are those which please Him best. . . . He wants them to learn to walk and must therefore take away His hand. . . . He is pleased even with their stumbles. (40)

In a book told from the twisted and darkened point of view of the hellish tempter, the power of choice and active obedience to God still shines through. Screwtape worries, “Our cause is never more in danger than when a human, no longer desiring, but still intending, to do our Enemy’s will, looks round upon a universe from which every trace of Him seems to have vanished, and asks why he has been forsaken, and still obeys” (40).

Another surprising aspect of Lewis’s argument in this book is the emphasis on pleasure and pain as “unmistakably real, and therefore . . . a touchstone of reality” (64). Wormwood is severely chastised for allowing the patient to go on a walk and read a book he enjoys. Screwtape argues that pleasure and honest delight allows the patient to recover himself, to “come home” or to fully be himself. It remains Screwtape’s desire to detach the patient from himself—the core of his unique and image-bearing selfhood—and thus detach him from God. True to the paradoxical skill of Lewis, the demon also explains that while the Enemy wants to detach humans from “the clamor of self-will” (65), the deepest likings and impulses of any person are the raw material, the starting point, the distinctness out of which a relationship to God grows and blossoms and yields fruit.

Because of this, Screwtape bemoans, “The man who truly and disinterestedly enjoys any one thing in the world, for its own sake, and without caring two-pence what other people say about it, is by that very fact forearmed against some of our subtlest modes of attack” (66). He goes on to say that cricket, stamp collecting, cocoa, and even tripe and onions have a power to ward off social temptation and has a sort of humility and self-forgetfulness to it that has a spiritual relevance. Augustine (Bishop of Hippo), who influenced Lewis, also discusses the fact that we are what we love, and that formation of our loves is essential to our personhood and our faith. Faith is not a stepping out of our particular selves, but moving more deeply into it toward our Maker. Yet Screwtape is still hopeful that the patient will recover from the moment of pleasure. His best advice for salvaging the patient once he has come closer to himself is to be sure he doesn’t take any action that corresponds to this revelation.

All human action takes place in a linear stream of time. Through *The Screwtape Letters*, Lewis redefines our conception of time: Screwtape often advises Wormwood to take advantage of the patient’s limited understanding of it. Because He destined people for eternity, God intends us to be concerned with two things: eternity itself and the present. Since the present best reflects the freedom and actuality of eternity, Screwtape encourages Wormwood to have the patient focus on the past, or especially the future—which is pure conjecture and therefore completely unreal. Lewis thus clarifies our experience of time, but also moves toward explaining God’s perspective. God’s actions (and answers to prayer) are not chained by adherence to a linear progression of time. Moreover, His experience of time protects the integrity of human will and action: “the Enemy does not *foresee* the humans making their free contributions in a future, but sees them doing so in His unbounded Now. And obviously to watch a man doing something is not to make him do it” (150).

C.S. Lewis’s *The Screwtape Letters* parades us through the unfamiliar and the both laughable and sickening mind of a demon dedicated to human destruction. The jarring reversal of values and hellishly bureaucratic diction forces us to abandon our typical perspective and interpretive lens for religious literature. And on this voyage through dark spirits, Lewis not only entertains us (or frightens us) with hell’s perspective, but also awakens our hearts to heaven’s reality. *The Screwtape Letters* pushes its readers to confront our often confused and limited perception of reality and, from this new awareness, challenges us to choose to act upon what is true.

## For Further Biographical Study

Please see the following resource: <http://www.cslewis.org/resource/chronocsl/>. This website—created by the C.S. Lewis Foundation—suggests and links to a number of other excellent sources.



## TRACING THE GREAT IDEAS

You may record your Great Ideas Quotes on the pages that follow or you may want to consider placing copies of the Great Ideas Quotes pages in a three-ring notebook at the beginning of your guide work to keep a “map” of your reading.

You should feel free to shorthand quotes by listing the quote’s beginning and end, then its page number, on the proper Great Ideas Quotes page.

### Examples:

#### Great Ideas Quotes throughout the book for the theme *Relationships*

“When he gets to his pew and looks round him he sees just that selection of his neighbours whom he has hitherto avoided. You want to lean pretty heavily on those neighbours. Make his mind flit to and fro between an expression like ‘the body of Christ’ and the actual faces in the next pew.” (Chapter 2, pg. 6)

**shorthand version:**

“when he gets to his . . . next pew.” (6)

“Make sure that they [his prayers for his mother] are always very ‘spiritual,’ that he is always concerned with the state of her soul and never wither her rheumatism.” (Chapter 3, pg. 12)

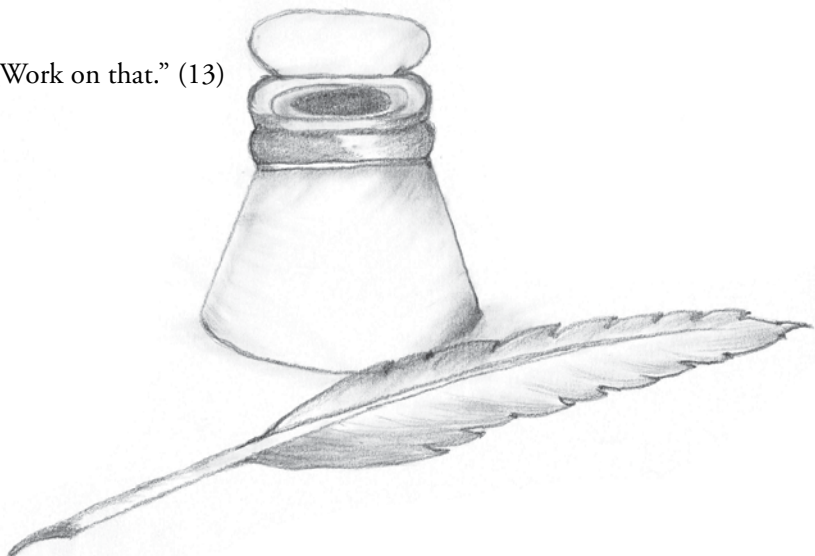
**shorthand version:**

“make sure that . . . her rheumatism.” (12)

“When two humans have lived together for many years it usually happens that each has tones of voice and expressions of face which are almost unendurably irritating to the other. Work on that.” (Chapter 3, pg. 13)

**shorthand version:**

“when two humans have lived together. . . . Work on that.” (13)



















## SUMMARIZE THE CONTEXT ESSAYS: MERE CHRISTIANITY EXCERPTS

Before you start *The Screwtape Letters*, you will read and summarize the excerpts from *Mere Christianity* we have selected. Then cross-check your summaries with ours (in the teacher's edition) to make sure you have covered the topic adequately. Our summaries range from 50–125 words, but your teacher will assign a word count for yours. These “context essays” will help you to understand and gain insight into many of the ideas that arise in *The Screwtape Letters*. An important part of becoming a good reader involves being able to summarize your reading in such a way that someone else can understand what you have read.

### “Charity” Summary (from *Mere Christianity*, Book III, Chapter 9)

Charity is love and the effort that leans toward love. The practice of this allows us to see God and rescues us from pride. We can learn to treat others with charity by treating them in this manner even when we do not feel this way toward them.

### “The Great Sin” Summary (from *Mere Christianity*, Book III, Chapter 8)

Pride is spiritual cancer. It is the complete anti-God state of mind—it elevates itself and pays no heed to any good it receives outside of itself or any reverence it owes to anyone or anything else. It compares itself and competes with others—the pleasure of being above all the rest. It always looks down and cannot look up. It is the foundation for all other vices and sins. Lewis says, “As long as you are proud you cannot know God.”

## “Faith” Summary (from *Mere Christianity*, Book III, Chapter 11)

Faith has to do with remembering and holding on to what we believe even when our mood has changed for any number of reasons. Daily prayers, Bible reading, and church are necessary parts of the Christian life that help us to do this. Part of the process of holding on to faith involves realizing that we are not making a bargain with God; instead, we are entering into participation with Him.

## “The Invasion” Summary (from *Mere Christianity*, Book II, Chapter 2)

Lewis says that we live in a world under the authority of a dark power, which is often referred to in the New Testament and better known as the devil. There is a war between God and the devil, but it isn't a war between two equal parts. It's a civil war; God once created the devil and he then rebelled. Lewis warns his readers to neither ascribe more power to the devil than he actually has, nor ignore his existence.

## “Time and Beyond Time” Summary (from *Mere Christianity*, Book IV, Chapter 3)

Lewis uses the metaphor of an author writing a book to explain God's relationship to time. An author may leave his writing for hours, but when he returns no time has passed for his character in the book. Every scene in the book is happening at the same time for the author, because he changes things in the beginning, middle, and end without the constraints of linear time. God is the author and we are characters in the book. We humans experience time in a linear fashion. The past is things that have definitely happened and remain unchangeable. The present is the only moment in which we can make decisions and act. The future is anticipated events that haven't happened yet. God sees everything at once. He is outside time, like an author is outside a book. To the author, everything happening in the book is happening in the present. Therefore, God does not “foresee” us doing anything, but sees it in the present. This metaphor helps us imagine how God is able to coordinate everything and answer prayers.

## UNIT 1: PREFACE; CHAPTERS 1–3



### Make Notes in Your Book\*

Don't forget to make notes in your book!



### Tracing the Great Ideas\*

Find quotes in these chapters that relate to the great ideas, or themes. Write down the quote with its page number on the corresponding Great Ideas Quotes pages provided (at the beginning of this guide). Keeping track of quotes will help you write the final theme essays!

#### Example quotes and their themes

##### Great Ideas Quotes throughout the book for the theme *Relationships*

“I do not mean the Church . . . tempters uneasy” (5).

“When he gets to his . . . next pew” (6).

##### Great Ideas Quotes throughout the book for the theme *Gradual road to hell*

“Even if a particular train of thought . . . the stream” (2).

“Keep pressing home . . . of things” (4).

##### Great Ideas Quotes throughout the book for the theme *Individual soul*

“The history of the European War . . . to Screwtape” (x).



### Tell It Back\*

Do an oral summary of your reading on a recording device or to another human being. Narrate the most important events in order while sharing the elements of the characters' development that are important.

## Reading Questions

1. In the first letter, Screwtape says that people no longer think about doctrines as true or false, but use other adjectives. What are some of these adjectives?

These adjectives include “academic,” “practical,” “outworn,” “contemporary,” “conventional,” and “ruthless” (1).

\*You'll see these icons at the beginning of each unit as reminders to make notes, trace great ideas, and tell back what you've read.

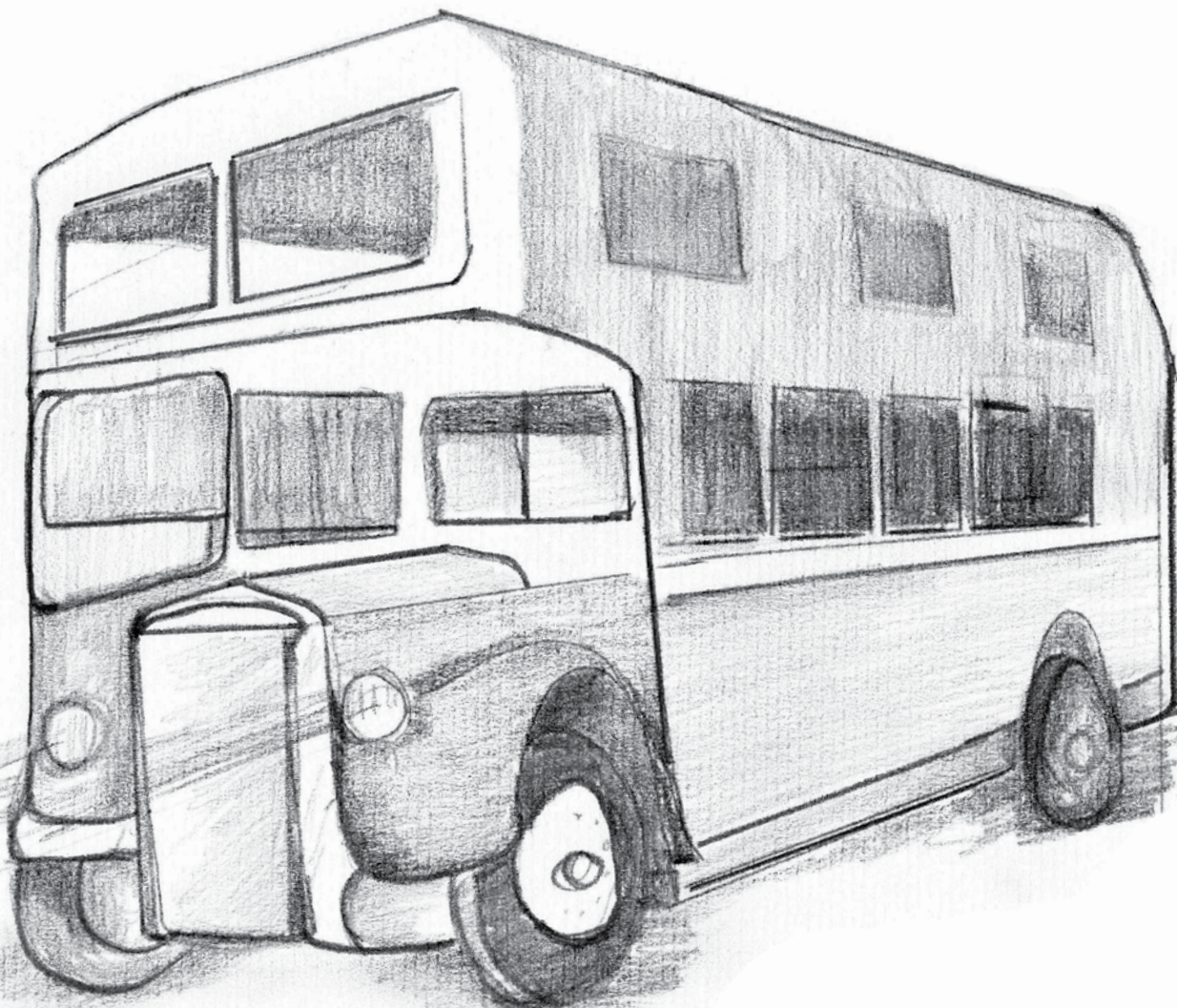
2. On page 5, Screwtape describes two different meanings of the word “church.” What are these two meanings?

Screwtape describes the Church that is the body of believers spread out across space and time. He describes this Church as “terrible as an army with banners” (5).

The second church he describes is the material church that the patient sees—the church building and the people inside.

3. Who does the patient live with?

The patient lives with his mother (11).



## Discussion Questions

1. In the preface to *The Screwtape Letters*, C.S. Lewis explains two errors people make when considering the issue of devils. Identify each view. Then, from your own knowledge and the excerpt “The Invasion” from *Mere Christianity*, explain why Lewis believes Christians should avoid both these views.

The first error is to disbelieve in demons entirely. In the excerpt, Lewis notices how often the New Testament speaks seriously of a dark power. To deny the existence of spiritual forces behind death, disease, and temptation is to willfully ignore many passages of Scripture. Lewis relates disbelief of devils as “intellectual snobbery” that creates a “materialist” in danger of actually meeting the devil at a later date (*STL*, preface, IX; *MC*, “The Invasion,” 40).

The second error is an unhealthy obsession with devils. This leads to a “magician” mind-set and perhaps falling into the trap of dualism—believing the universe is a struggle between two equal and opposite forces (*STL*, preface, IX; *MC*, “The Invasion,” 40).

2. According to these chapters, how do reason and emotion affect spiritual development?

Reason allows the mind to grasp what is true. This is why Screwtape implores Wormwood to prevent any true science or logical reason to occur in his patient. Reason, once properly awakened, can also serve God’s purposes. Emotion, on the other hand, is more volatile. God allows the rush of a new conversion to fade: “Desiring their freedom, He therefore refuses to carry them, by their mere affections and habits, to any goals which He sets before them” (7). Emotions can thus trouble a Christian’s faith even when there is no rational ground for doubt or disappointment (2–8).

3. Screwtape reveals prayer can be stripped of its power. How?

Prayer can be stripped of its power when a Christian’s thoughts turn inward. When a Christian desires to reach a more advanced level of spirituality, he may fixate on a certain self-image and neglect his own obvious faults instead of focusing on basic beliefs and responsibilities. Prayer can also be stripped of its power when a Christian prays “spiritualized” prayers, which focus on other people’s sins and disregard their actual needs. This changes the person he is praying for from a real individual into an idea. A prayer for an imaginary person will not help change how the praying person interacts with real people (11–13).

## Life Questions—Journaling Assignment

Feel free to respond to the life questions here or to keep them in a separate journal used for meditative contemplation.

1. Screwtape encourages Wormwood to focus the patient on other people's faults (such as other people at church and his own mother) without recognizing his own sinful situation or habits that annoy other people. Examine your own life. Are there areas of life in which you are quick to point out the flaws of others? Does this habit help or hurt your enjoyment of life and relationships?

Answers will vary.

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2. Examine your own prayer habits. What satisfies you about your prayer life and what do you feel is lacking? Have you ever found yourself falling into the unhelpful habits that Screwtape encourages?

Answers will vary.

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## Write Your Own Discussion Questions

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2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Chapter Summaries

Write your own chapter summaries here or in your binder and then cross-check them with the summaries in the teacher's edition.

**Preface:** \_\_\_\_\_

Lewis addresses the two different errors people believe about devils. The first is to disbelieve in their existence entirely, and the second is to become obsessed with demons. He also reminds readers to take Screwtape's writings with a grain of salt, since the devil is a liar.

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**Chapter 1:** Screwtape (ST) admonishes Wormwood (WW) about the patient's reading material. He encourages WW to avoid argument and instead blur the distinction between true and false. As the modern man already possesses many incompatible philosophies, ST suggests using descriptive yet meaningless adjectives such as "practical," "academic," "contemporary," etc. Additionally, ST believes that humans can be distracted from the reality of their situation by thinking about "real life" (i.e., the bus, the newsboy). The important thing is to keep the patient confused and unaware of his ignorance.

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**Chapter 2:** The patient becomes a Christian. ST encourages continued criticism of the church (not to be confused with the Church—the body of Christ). By focusing the patient on his inevitable disappointment after the first rush fades, WW can undermine his faith. ST desires the patient to remain dependent on emotion and not utilize his reason. In fact, there is no rational reason for the patient's disappointment. ST also hopes WW will foster the habit of judging others without considering one's own flaws.

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**Chapter 3:** ST gives WW a list of four different ways to combat the patient's prayers for his mother. The first method consists of focusing the patient on his inner life. By making religion something extremely internal and self-centered, the patient will miss true self-reflection. Second, WW could strip a prayer's power by "spiritualizing" it, by making the request so abstract that the patient ends up praying for an imaginary person. Third, the tempter could exaggerate the little annoyances of people who live together and foster the assumption that the patient doesn't annoy others. The last method involves focusing the patient on the tone of voice and using a double standard of judgment for himself.

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## UNIT 2: CHAPTERS 4–7



Make Notes in Your Book



Tracing the Great Ideas



Tell It Back

### Reading Questions

1. What is the definition of a materialist magician?

A materialist magician is “the man, not using, but veritably worshipping, what he vaguely calls ‘Forces’ while denying the existence of ‘spirits’” (31–32).

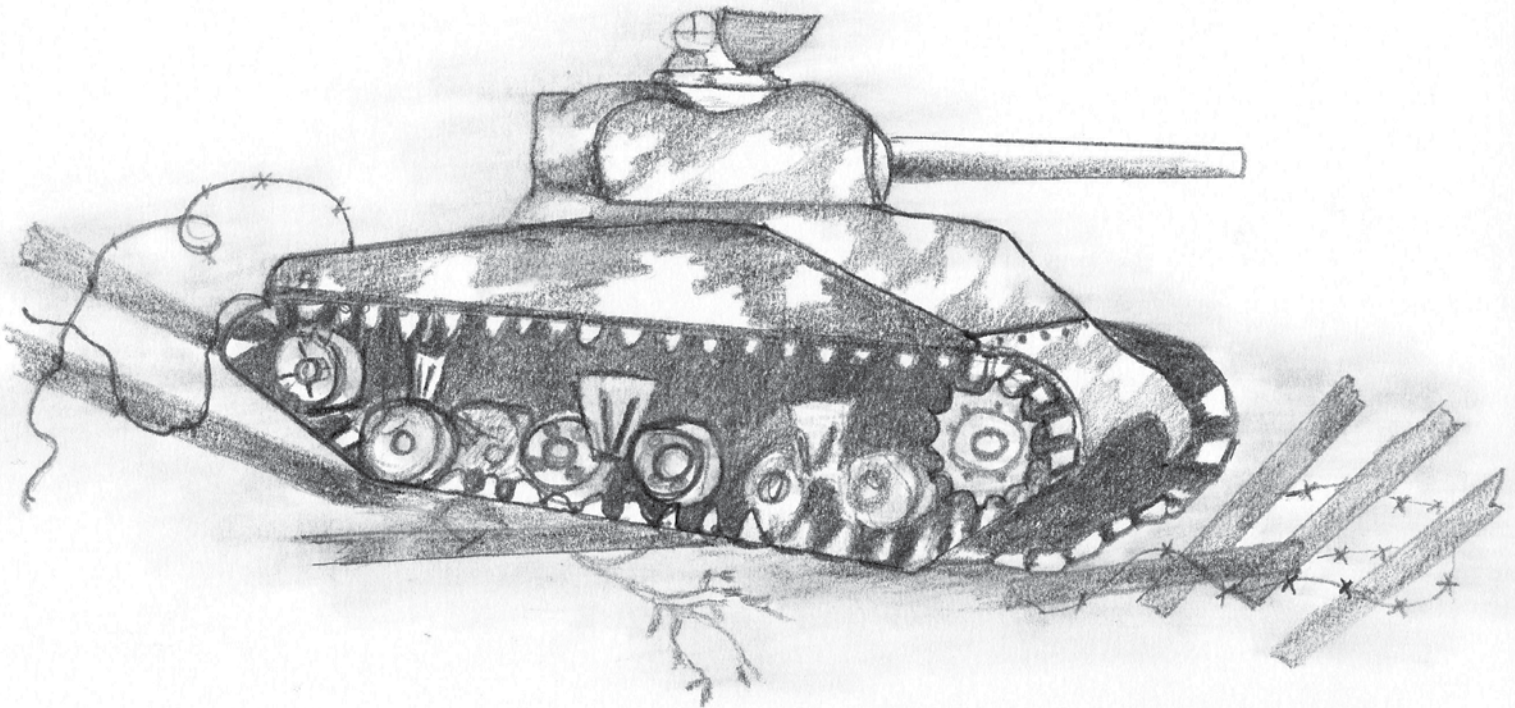
2. How does prayer “practiced by those who are very far advanced in the Enemy’s service” seem similar to the prayer of new “clever and lazy patients” (16)?

Both types of prayer appear like silent meditation. Therefore, a new patient might believe he is sincerely praying well, when he is actually lazy (16).

3. Does Screwtape wish more people would die in nursing homes or that more people would die during a war?

ST would prefer that everyone die of a ripe old age in a nursing home. War forces people to remember that everyone dies, which opens up the possibility that an individual might do some hard thinking and take action in her spiritual life (23–24).





## Discussion Questions

1. According to these chapters, how can prayer be turned into idolatry?

Because God is unfathomable, when a Christian prays he might have a certain image of God in mind. Fixating on this image can cause him to conflate the real person of God with a physical object or mental image. If a person does not acknowledge the distinction between what he thinks God to be, and what He really is, his prayers are to “the thing that he has made, not to the Person who has made him” (18).

2. Are major world events really important? Compare and contrast Wormwood’s and Screwtape’s perspectives on the World War II.

WW is “delirious with joy” because of the death and destruction of war (21). He also delights that the thought of war torments his patient. ST, on the other hand, views the large-scale war as of secondary importance compared to the spiritual state of patients during the war. Although he admits finding war amusing, the mature tempter critiques WW’s enthusiasm as drunkenness and self-indulgence. War provides fodder for the devil’s temptations, but it can also strengthen God’s position, as “in wartime not even a human can believe he is going to live forever” (24). This thus brings spiritual matters to a forefront, and humans might turn to God (21–24).

3. Why does Screwtape hope to produce a materialist magician? Use the definition from reading question 1 to help you answer this question.

A materialist magician is “the man, not using, but veritably worshipping, what he vaguely calls ‘Forces’ while denying the existence of ‘spirits’” (31–32). A “force” is power that influences life, but doesn’t possess personality, whereas a spirit, such as God, does. A materialist magician will thus become influenced by demonic spirits under the name of “forces,” but will refuse to believe in the person of God (31–32).

4. Why does Screwtape consider including patriotism or pacifism as part of his religion detrimental to the patient’s faith?

By incorporating political beliefs as part of his religious beliefs, a Christian now regards his political viewpoint as more valuable than it actually is. Additionally, the Christian runs the risk of inverting the importance of the political cause and religion. ST isn’t arguing for Christian beliefs to influence political, but he’s hoping that Christian doctrines might take a backseat to political agendas. Politics could become a substitute for Christianity. ST thus desires people to value their political activities more than their religious duties (34).

## Life Questions—Journaling Assignment

Feel free to respond to the life questions here or to keep them in a separate journal used for meditative contemplation.

5. In letter 6, ST urges the junior demon to encourage the patient to hate the people with whom he comes into contact daily and to redirect any good and kind thoughts his patient might have toward people far away from his everyday life—those people the patient may not even know. Who are the closest people in your life, and how do you treat them? Have you been treating those close to you badly while imagining you are doing good to people you don’t know? How do your actions toward those closest to you measure up to how you believe you should live?

Answers will vary.

6. Screwtape demonstrates in letter 7 how adding other ideas to Christianity (in the patient’s case, pacifism or patriotism) can cause these other ideas to become more important than the core message of Christianity. In the Christian world today and in your own life, what ideas do you see commonly added to Christianity? In your own experience, how do these experiences affect one’s personal faith and the Church as a whole?

Answers will vary.

## Write Your Own Discussion Questions

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2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



## Chapter Summaries

Write your own chapter summaries here or in your binder and then cross-check them with the summaries in the teacher's edition.

**Chapter 4:** ST encourages the practice of connecting prayer to the patient's mood. Instead of asking for virtue, the patient will try to manufacture the feelings on his own. Additionally, ST advises that a patient should fixate on a certain, created image of God that doesn't relate to the real person of God. However, if the patient should acknowledge his inability to correctly conceive of God and pray to the true, unfathomable Being, then his prayer transforms from innocuous to dangerous.

**Chapter 5:** WW expresses delirious delight over the war, but ST remains focused on the individual state of the patient's soul. War benefits the devil only by destroying souls. ST laments that war can also bring out virtues, such as charity or courage. ST believes it is better for the demons if every person lived a peaceful life and died spiritually unprepared.

**Chapter 6:** ST labors to make humans concerned with what will happen to them, and not what they will do. He hopes they can avoid realizing that the present anxiety might be the burden that the Lord has asked them to bear. When the patient focuses on the Enemy, ST suggests turning those thoughts back inward. However, when acting upon sinful desires, the patient should remain completely ignorant of her present state. Realizing that people have both good and evil desires, ST suggests keeping malice and hatred in the center of the patient's life. Those in her immediate vicinity should bear the brunt of

her sins, while her benevolence and good will are cast out to distant places and people. Eventually, her kindness will extend only to something so far removed that it becomes complete fantasy.

**Chapter 7:** Demons keep their presence hidden in the present age. ST desires society to produce materialist magicians—people who believe in vague forces, but not in spirits. In this letter, ST also tackles the issue of whether or not the patient should be cast as a pacifist or patriot. Pacifism helps hide cowardice. However, it can also become part of the patient’s religion, placing him in a Christian faction. By tying “the cause” into the patient’s religion, ST hopes to move him toward evaluating religion based upon its value as part of “the cause.”

## UNIT 3: CHAPTERS 8–11



Make Notes in Your Book



Tracing the Great Ideas



Tell It Back

### Reading Questions

1. In the essay “Faith” (the excerpt from *Mere Christianity* you read before you began *The Screwtape Letters*), Lewis provides three real-life examples of emotion affecting a person’s faith in something ordinary. What is one of the examples?

Lewis talks about how emotion can make people lose faith in anesthetics, make them trust a proven liar, and make them doubt their ability to float in water (*MC*, “Faith,” 139–141).

2. Screwtape describes humans as amphibians on page 37. What does he mean?

ST describes humans as amphibians because they are half spirit and half animal (37).

3. The patient meets a middle-aged married couple at his office. What information does Screwtape give about their character?

ST describes this couple as rich, smart, shallowly intellectual, and skeptical. They are snobbish, making fun of things that “everybody” likes (49).

## Discussion Questions

1. Explain the law of undulation. How does this relate to a Christian's spiritual development?

Being both spirit and material, humans experience constant change, and yet also yearn for consistency. This contributes to the undulation, in which humans experience ups and downs, or peaks and troughs, but eventually return to normal level. This occurs in all aspects of life, including their spiritual life (37–38).

A trough period for a Christian might feel like a dry spell or a decrease in passion. ST hopes to use this time to tempt the patient and cause him to despair. He hopes to convince his patient that “the first ardours of his conversion might have been expected to last, and ought to have lasted, forever, and that his present dryness is an equally permanent condition” (45). However, God also uses these low stretches to continue molding Christians into Christlike creatures. In these periods, God purposefully distances Himself to allow people to obey Him out of love and not by force or out of overwhelming emotion (39–40).

2. Why are friendships important to spiritual development? (Consider the temptation to create parallel lives and the role of pride.)

Relationships influence our own actions and attitudes. In order to avoid social unpleasantness with her friends, a person sometimes pretends or allows others to believe that she agrees with them. As ST points out, “All mortals tend to turn into the thing they are pretending to be. This is elementary” (50). If a patient keeps pretending to agree with her friends, she will eventually adopt those views herself (50).

Additionally, pretending harmony and agreement with people who share divergent values could lead to the creation of a double life; a person acts differently with her friends than with her church associates. Although this incongruity could seem troubling, someone could be tempted to think highly of herself for being well rounded or complex (52).

3. Describe the four different types of laughter, and provide examples of each from your own life. Which types does Screwtape consider dangerous or beneficial to his own cause? Has this been the case in your observation? Personal examples and answers will of course vary.

- a. Joy—this occurs in strong, healthy relationships. The tone is something similar to music. ST considers this “phenomenon . . . disgusting and a direct insult to the realism, dignity and austerity of Hell” (54).

b. Fun—this laughter springs from the play instinct. Sometimes, fun laughter can cause distraction, but overall it promotes virtues (54).

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c. Joke Proper—the sudden recognition of something out of place and therefore funny. The devil can use this to twist evils to look admirable (54–56).

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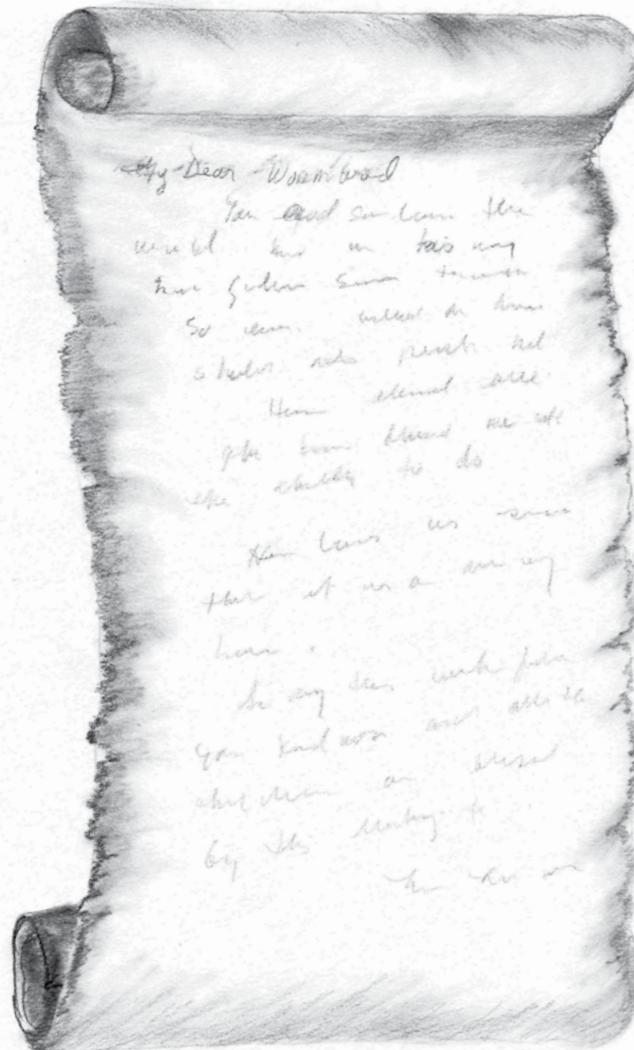
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d. Flippancy—a cavalier attitude toward life. Flippancy assumes everything has already been proven ridiculous (56).

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## Life Questions—Journaling Assignment

Feel free to respond to the life questions here or to keep them in a separate journal used for meditative contemplation.

1. In what ways have you noticed the law of undulation in your own life? Does recognizing the natural ups and downs of spiritual life encourage you or discourage you? Why?

Answers will vary.

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2. Screwtape notes that friendships can greatly influence the patient's life. Consider your own friends. How have your friends influenced your beliefs and actions? Do your friends have a positive or negative impact on your spiritual development?

Answers will vary.

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## Write Your Own Discussion Questions

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2. 

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## Chapter Summaries

Write your own chapter summaries here or in your binder and then cross-check them with the summaries in the teacher's edition.

**Chapter 8:** ST explains the law of undulation as the peaks and troughs of human experience. He warns that the Enemy works during both periods, but especially during troughs. The troughs enable love as the result of free will, which God desires over “forced” love. ST fears the Christian who cannot “see” God, yet still obeys.

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**Chapter 9:** Troughs present great opportunities for temptation. However, ST warns WW that although pleasure won over many souls, pleasure itself remains a heavenly invention. Sin corrupts pleasure when it is enjoyed at the wrong time or to a forbidden extent. ST encourages keeping the patient ignorant of the law of undulation by making him believe this trough is a permanent state. Through doubting his first passionate response, perhaps the patient can start to moderate his religion or even consider his conversion just a “phase.”

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**Chapter 10:** ST reveals his excitement about the patient’s new friends. ST dreams of the patient creating two parallel lives. He further hopes that the patient might take pride at his two incompatible lives, even looking down on both groups of acquaintances for their limited experiences.

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**Chapter 11:** ST overviews four different types of laughter (Joy, Fun, Joke Proper, and Flippancy) and explains their usefulness to the devil’s cause. Joy is antithetical to hell’s devices. Fun can be used as a distraction, but it still promotes virtues. Joke Proper can not only hide vices, but even evoke admiration for deplorable traits by means of the joke. Flippancy refers to a dismissive attitude that laughs at serious matters and assumes everything is ridiculous. Flippancy destroys intellect and fails to build relationships between people.

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