

FELLOWSHIP FOR PERFORMING ARTS



C.S. LEWIS

O N S T A G E

FURTHER UP & FURTHER IN

WRITTEN AND PERFORMED BY MAX MCLEAN

D I S C U S S I O N G U I D E

BY DR. DEVIN BROWN

1. “Ever since we humans have been able to think, we have wondered what this universe is and how it came to be. Roughly two views have held to give us an approximate answer. There is the materialist view, and there is the religious view.”

These words come from chapter four of *Mere Christianity* titled “What Lies Behind the Law.” By *materialist* Lewis means the view that there is nothing beyond matter, nothing besides atoms and molecules. According to this view, love is merely a combination of chemicals, humans are nothing more than their bodies and everything we experience in life is just the result of physical processes and properties. Materialists do not believe that the physical world was created by something or someone outside of the universe because according to them, there is nothing outside of the universe.

The opposing view, what Lewis calls the *religious* view, maintains that there is more to reality than just the physical world – including the moral law that gives us our sense of right and wrong and a supernatural being who is the source of this moral law and of the universe itself.



FOR DISCUSSION

- Here Lewis uses the word materialist to describe the view that there is nothing beyond physical matter. Do you know any materialists who claim there is nothing beyond what we can touch, taste, see or hear? If so, how do you think they would explain the sense of right and wrong that we all seem to share?

LOOK DEEPER

Lewis goes on to say that those who believe matter is all there is must also believe human life is just an accident. As he puts it, after billions of years all the right ingredients at the right temperature came together at the right moment to produce the tiny fermentation needed for life. And after billions more years some of this organic life developed into creatures like us with minds that think and make inferences about the universe in which we live. *But is this really possible?* Here Lewis is pointing to the Argument from Design, which says that if we find design in Nature (such as highly developed creatures with highly developed minds), the most likely explanation is that there was a Designer.

2. “Science, by that I mean scientists, observes the behavior of things within the universe. They cannot make statements about things beyond the universe.”

Every so often a scientist will make the news by claiming there is no God and no such thing as life after death. Here Lewis means that scientists cannot make *scientific* statements about anything beyond the universe because science is limited to making claims about what can be observed and tested within the physical world. Lewis’ point is that if scientists claim there is nothing besides the physical world, they are no longer speaking as scientists.

FOR DISCUSSION

- Have you ever heard it said that science has “proved” that God does not exist? What is your response?

LOOK DEEPER

Lewis was not anti-science – quite the opposite. But he maintained that when science goes beyond making statements about the physical world, it becomes what he called *scientism*. Have you ever met anyone whose faith could best be described as scientism, the view that only science can accurately describe and explain reality? How might they account for human love or our experience of beauty?

3. “If the materialist view is true, our minds must in reality be merely chance arrangements of atoms in skulls. We never think a thought because it is true, only because blind Nature forces us to think it. We never do an act because it is right, only because blind Nature forces us to do it.”

Here Lewis draws from the Argument from Reason, which asks the question: If our ability to reason is just the result of the chance arrangement of atoms inside our skulls, why should we trust it? Lewis maintained that materialism is self-refuting because it professes to depend on inferences from observed facts but also claims that our ability to make these inferences is merely the result of random chemical reactions in our brains.

FOR DISCUSSION

- We instinctively want to trust what our best reasoning says is true. But if our reason is simply a result of a series of random chemical processes, is there any basis for believing the conclusions our thinking provides?

LOOK DEEPER

In his original Broadcast Talks, Lewis stated the Argument from Reason this way: “Supposing there was no intelligence behind the universe, no creative mind. In that case, nobody designed my brain for the purpose of thinking. It is merely that when the atoms inside my skull happen, for physical or chemical reasons, to arrange themselves in a certain way, this gives me, as a by-product, the sensation I call thought. But, if so, how can I trust my own thinking to be true? ... Unless I believe in God, I cannot believe in thought.”

4. “I am a very ordinary layman of the Church of England. Gave up Christianity at 14. Came back to it around 30. A long night’s talk with Professor Tolkien in 1931 had a good deal to do with it.”

The story of Lewis’ early life is told at length in his autobiography, *Surprised by Joy*. As a boy, Lewis was taken to St. Mark’s, his family’s parish church near the outskirts of Belfast. After a period when he tried hard to pray, read the Bible, and obey his conscience, Lewis lost his faith around the time he was 14 and did not return to belief until his early thirties when he was teaching at Oxford and had developed a friendship with J.R.R. Tolkien.

FOR DISCUSSION

- Lewis’ return to Christianity did not take place until nearly half his life was over. What advantage might it have given him to have seen the Christian faith from the outside for so many years?

LOOK DEEPER

“The Prodigal Son at least walked home on his own feet,” Lewis writes in *Surprised by Joy*. By contrast, Lewis characterized his own return as a prodigal “brought in kicking, struggling, resentful and darting his eyes in every direction for a chance of escape.” He described himself at the time as the most reluctant convert in all of England. The talk with J.R.R. Tolkien that Lewis refers to occurred on Sept. 19, 1931, during a late-night stroll on Addison’s Walk, the wooded path in Oxford that runs alongside the Magdalen College grounds.

5. “Against this was my one single ambition, from which I never wavered, and on which I staked my whole contentment. And that was to be a writer - a poet specifically. Not just a poet but to be known as a poet. Poets were quite the celebrities in those days. In that endeavor, I failed. At my age Keats and Shelley were dead. Byron and Bronte had completed their most distinguished works. All I had published were two volumes of poetry that no one read.”

This passage is based on a letter that Lewis wrote to his boyhood friend Arthur Greeves on Aug. 18, 1930. The two volumes of poetry referred to here are *Spirits in Bondage* (1919) and *Dymer* (1926), works that were written and published when Lewis was still an atheist.

FOR DISCUSSION

- Here Lewis makes a distinction between wanting to be a poet and wanting to be known as a poet. Have you experienced your own version of this type of distinction – the difference between wanting to be something and wanting to be known for being something?

LOOK DEEPER

The letter this passage comes from can be found in *They Stand Together: The Letters of C. S. Lewis to Arthur Greeves (1914 -1963)*. In it, Lewis concludes: “The side of me which longs, not to write, for no one can stop us doing that, but to be approved as a writer, is not the side of us that is really worth much.”

6. “It wasn’t until my full conversion to Christianity that I began to find my voice; not in poetry but in prose. What followed was a literary flow that would not cease.”

Lewis may not have found his literary voice until nearly half of his life was over, but during this second half he more than made up for any previous lack of accomplishment. In addition to the scholarly books we might expect an Oxford don to publish, Lewis also wrote apologetic works, speculative fiction, satirical fiction, fairy tales and dozens of articles and essays, as well as more poetry.



FOR DISCUSSION

- It wasn’t until Lewis’ conversion to Christianity that he really found his voice. Is there a similar aspect in your life that has blossomed or flourished because of your faith?

LOOK DEEPER

In *C.S. Lewis: A Companion and Guide*, Walter Hooper lists 70 books by Lewis, some of them collections of letters or essays put together after Lewis’ death. Major works from this “literary flow that would not cease” include:

- The Pilgrim’s Regress (1933)
- The Allegory of Love (1936)
- Out of the Silent Planet (1938)
- The Problem of Pain (1940)
- The Screwtape Letters (1942)
- A Preface to “Paradise Lost” (1942)
- Broadcast Talks (later part of *Mere Christianity*, 1942)
- Christian Behavior (later part *Mere Christianity*, 1943)
- Perelandra (1943)
- The Abolition of Man (1943)
- Beyond Personality (later part of *Mere Christianity*, 1944)
- That Hideous Strength (1945)
- The Great Divorce (1946)
- Miracles (1947)
- The Chronicles of Narnia (1950-1956)
- Mere Christianity* (1952)
- English Literature in the Sixteenth Century Excluding Drama (1954)
- Surprised by Joy (1955)
- Till We Have Faces (1958)
- Reflections on the Psalms (1958)
- The Four Loves (1960)
- A Grief Observed (1961)
- Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer (1964)

7. “This longing is the music we were born remembering. I called it Joy, which must be distinguished very sharply from Happiness or Pleasure, except that anyone who has ever experienced Joy will want it again. I do not believe earthly pleasures were ever meant to satisfy it, only to arouse it, to suggest the real thing.”

In a chapter in *Mere Christianity* titled “Hope,” we find one of Lewis’ most famous statements about this longing he called Joy. There he writes, “If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.”

FOR DISCUSSION

• In *Surprised by Joy* Lewis writes that whether his story will matter to anyone else will depend on the degree to which they have had a similar experience of “Joy.” Have you ever experienced this longing that nothing in the world can satisfy? How would you describe it?

LOOK DEEPER

Lewis was surprised by Joy. Why? Because if the physical world is all there is, this mysterious longing should not exist. As he explains in *Mere Christianity*, “Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for those desires exists. A baby feels hunger: well, there is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim: well, there is such a thing as water. Men feel sexual desire: well, there is such a thing as sex.”

8. “Perhaps the only service I could give to my unbelieving neighbor is to explain and defend the belief that is common to nearly all Christians and at all times.”

Lewis biographers Roger Lancelyn Green and Walter Hooper summarize Lewis’ intentions this way: “Almost as soon as he became a Christian he found that many of his co-religionists were far more interested in talking about *differences* between Christians than what they had *in common*. Lewis seems to have made up his mind almost at once not to be drawn into what he saw as fruitless controversy.”

FOR DISCUSSION

• Why do you think Christians often focus more on our differences than the things we share in common?

LOOK DEEPER

In his Preface to *Mere Christianity* Lewis explains, “The reader should be warned that I offer no help to anyone who is hesitating between two Christian ‘denominations.’ You will not learn from me whether you ought to become Anglican, a Methodist, a Presbyterian or a Roman Catholic. This omission is intentional.” Lewis took the title *Mere Christianity* from the English clergyman Richard Baxter, who in 1680 wrote: “I am a Christian, a Mere Christian, of no other religion.... I am against all sects and dividing parties.”

9. “God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks to our conscience, but shouts in our pain: Pain is God’s megaphone to rouse a deaf world.”

In *The Problem of Pain* Lewis presents the classic dilemma that human suffering poses for belief in a loving God: “If God were good, he would wish to make his creatures perfectly happy, and if God were almighty, he would be able to do what he wished. But the creatures are not happy. Therefore, God lacks either goodness, or power, or both.” Lewis then presents ways to reconcile this apparent dilemma.

FOR DISCUSSION

• Lewis suggests that pain can sometimes be “God’s megaphone.” Has God ever used a painful experience to get your attention?

LOOK DEEPER

What we want, Lewis goes on to argue, is not a loving Father in Heaven who will not be satisfied with us until he has made us into a divine work of art, but a kindly, somewhat senile Grandfather in Heaven who would say of anything we happened to like doing, “What does it matter so long as they are contented?” We may wish that we were so unimportant to God that he would leave us alone to follow our own natural tendencies. But in this desire, Lewis claims, we are asking God not to love us more, but less.

10. “This little book, caught the attention of the BBC who invited me to give radio talks on Christianity. They said they did not want a clergyman or another religious jaw but a fresh, new voice.”

In February 1941, Lewis received a letter from James Welch, the Director of Religious Broadcasting for the BBC, who explained: “I write to ask whether you would be willing to help us in our work of religious broadcasting.” Citing the need for “a positive restatement of Christian doctrine in lay language,” Welch asked if Lewis would consider giving a series of talks titled something like “The Christian Faith as I See It – by A Layman.”



FOR DISCUSSION

- Can you think of any technical terms that are sometimes used to explain Christian doctrine that may seem confusing or off-putting?

LOOK DEEPER

Lewis' clear language and commonsense examples drew in listeners of all types. He was invited back by the BBC for a second series of talks, then a third, and finally a fourth. Originally published as separate works, in 1952 the talks were collected into the single volume we know today as *Mere Christianity*.

11. “All sorts of letters – and I felt it my duty to answer them fully. The postman’s knock brought daily despair. There were days I wrote thirty-five letters, all after work hours.”

On Dec. 23, 1941, Lewis wrote his friend Arthur Greeves, in part, to tell why he was unable to write earlier, explaining: “As the aftermath of those Broadcast Talks I gave early last summer, I had an enormous pile of letters from strangers to answer. One gets funny letters after broadcasting – some from lunatics who sign themselves ‘Jehovah’ or begin ‘Dear Mr. Lewis, I was married at the age of 20 to a man I didn’t love’ – but many from serious inquirers whom it was a duty to answer fully.”

FOR DISCUSSION

- Lewis felt it his duty to answer all serious inquirers who had written to him. Do you have a work that may sometimes seem burdensome that you feel it is your Christian duty to perform?

LOOK DEEPER

Today Lewis’ letters appear in several collections:

- Letters of C.S. Lewis (Harvest)
- Letters to An American Lady (Eerdmans)
- They Stand Together: The Letters of C.S. Lewis to Arthur Greeves (Macmillan)
- C.S. Lewis: Letters to Children (Touchstone)
- The Collected Letters of C.S. Lewis: Volumes 1, 2 and 3 (HarperSanFrancisco)
- The Latin Letters of C.S. Lewis (St. Augustine’s Press)

Lewis’ older brother, Warnie, who served as editor for the first edition of *Letters of C.S. Lewis* explained: “In making this selection from my brother’s correspondence, I have kept in mind not only those interested in the literary and religious aspects of his mind, but also – and perhaps more urgently – those who want to know what manner of man he was, and who may derive from these letters some idea of the liveliness, the color and wit displayed throughout his life by this best of brothers and friends.”

12. “What came into my head was the thought of an elder devil instructing a younger devil on the art of tempting an unsuspecting human on earth. The letters would show temptation from the devil’s point of view. In many ways these letters reflected my own battles with temptation.”

“My Dear Wormwood....” On May 2, 1941, British readers opened *The Guardian*, an Anglican religious newspaper, to find the first of 31 strange letters that arrived in weekly installments. The entire collection was published in Britain in 1942 and in the States a year later. Lewis made a brief return to Screwtape’s world in *Screwtape Proposes a Toast*,

a short piece that appeared in *The Saturday Evening Post* on Dec. 19, 1959 and is now included in most editions of *The Screwtape Letters*.

FOR DISCUSSION

- First published in 1942, *The Screwtape Letters* has never gone out of print, suggesting there is something universal about the human heart and the temptations that Lewis depicts. Can you think of one or more temptations that most people will probably face at some time or another?

LOOK DEEPER

In the Preface to the 1961 edition of *The Screwtape Letters*, Lewis offered this explanation of why he never wrote a corresponding book from the angel's point of view: "Ideally, Screwtape's advice to Wormwood should have been balanced by archangelical advice to the patient's guardian angel. Without this the picture of human life is lopsided. But who could supply the deficiency? Even if a man – and he would have to be a far better man than I – could scale the spiritual heights required, what 'answerable style' could he use? For the style would really be part of the content. Mere advice would be no good; every sentence would have to smell of Heaven."

13. "The satiric quality of the book made it an enormous success. Introduced me to America. They speak of the devil all the time over there."

The Screwtape Letters became Lewis' first truly popular book and propelled him to international fame. On Sept. 8, 1947, four years after its U.S. release, Lewis appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine pictured with a little devil on one shoulder and the caption "Oxford's C.S. Lewis – His Heresy: Christianity."

FOR DISCUSSION

- Lewis opens *The Screwtape Letters* with this epigram from Martin Luther: "The best way to drive out the devil, if he will not yield to texts of scripture, is to jeer and flout him, for he cannot bear scorn." Has humor ever played a role in a victory in your own spiritual life?

LOOK DEEPER

In the Preface to the 1961 edition, Lewis poked fun at the commercial success *Screwtape* enjoyed, claiming: "It is the sort of book that gets given to godchildren, the sort that gets read aloud at retreats. It is even, as I have noticed with a chastened smile, the sort that gravitates towards spare bedrooms, there to live a life of undisturbed tranquility in company with *The Road Mender*, *John Inglesant* and *The Life of the Bee*."

14. "The notion that all would like Christianity to be true; and that atheists are brave men who have accepted the defeat of the deepest desires is nonsense."

Sigmund Freud maintained that religious claims are merely wish fulfillment, and for much of his life Lewis fully embraced the view that God is nothing more than our desire to have a strong father figure who will protect and comfort us in a dangerous world. After becoming a Christian, he saw the flaw in Freud's position.

Against Freud's claim, Lewis asks who would be pleased to find that they are not their own master and that they have not only a master but also a judge? Whose wish is it that there is nothing even in the deepest recesses of their thoughts about which they could

say, “Keep out! This is my business”? Lewis confessed that before his conversion one of his greatest objections to faith was the fact that Christianity had at its center what he called a “Transcendental Interferer.”

FOR DISCUSSION

- In *Surprised by Joy* just before he admitted that God was God, Lewis writes, “Remember, I had always wanted, above all things, not to be ‘interfered with.’ I had wanted (mad wish) ‘to call my soul my own.’” Have you ever wished that God put no demands on you and let you live your life as you saw fit? Alternately, have you ever been thankful that God has not abandoned you to your own wants and desires?

LOOK DEEPER

“The one principle of hell is – ‘I am my own.’” Lewis uses this epigraph at the start of chapter 14 in *Surprised by Joy*. It comes from the following passage in George MacDonald’s *Unspoken Sermons*, a passage which could be said to describe the position of all those who have not submitted to God’s will:

For the one principle of hell is—“I am my own.” I am my own king and my own subject. I am the center from which go out my thoughts; I am the object and end of my thoughts; back upon me as the alpha and omega of life, my thoughts return. My own glory is, and ought to be, my chief care.

15. “Against this is the universal experience of a moral law; ‘I ought’ or ‘I ought not’ found in almost every culture; compelling us to do what is right and condemning us when we do not.”



Lewis begins *Mere Christianity* with these words: “Everyone has heard people quarrelling.” By this he means quarrelling about what someone ought or ought not to have done. In the chapters that follow, Lewis shows how people all over the world believe that humans should behave in a certain way – as seen in statements like “How would you like it if anyone did the same to you?” or “Come on, you promised.” He then asks readers to consider where this universally recognized moral standard came from.

FOR DISCUSSION

- When talking about faith with those who are not Christian, our sense of right and

wrong can be a good place to begin because of the common ground it provides. Our shared sense of morality says that certain things are just right, like treating others fairly and keeping promises. What would you say is the source of this shared sense of right and wrong?

LOOK DEEPER

The first part of *Mere Christianity* is titled “Right and Wrong as a Clue to the Meaning of the Universe.” Here Lewis maintains that our sense of right and wrong is something that must come from outside of us, and its existence means there is more to reality than just matter. Lewis is not claiming that our sense of right and wrong proves that God exists. His position is that God is the *best explanation* for our moral sense. As he puts it, our sense of right and wrong is a “clue” to something beyond the universe.

16. “For a time my religion was like that of the Jews.”

For some people, the journey from unbelief to belief in Christ occurs in a single step. For others, like Lewis, belief in God may come first, followed later by belief in Christ. Lewis makes it clear that in the famous moment in *Surprised by Joy* when he admitted that God was God, his conversion was “only to Theism, pure and simple, not to Christianity.” Belief in Christ would come around a year later for him.

FOR DISCUSSION

- Lewis had a number of stages in his conversion. Before he became a Christian, he was a Theist. Before believing in a personal God, he believed in an impersonal Spirit. Has your faith gone through different stages? If so, how would you describe them?

LOOK DEEPER

In this passage from *Surprised by Joy*, Lewis describes this step in his conversion:

You must picture me alone in that room in Magdalen night after night, feeling, whenever my mind lifted even for a second from my work, the steady, unrelenting approach of Him whom I so earnestly desired not to meet. That which I greatly feared had at last come upon me. In the Trinity Term of 1929 I gave in, and admitted that God was God, and knelt and prayed: perhaps, that night, the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England.

17. “This is where my friend, Professor Tolkien, was of help. He showed me that scattered among the pagan religions, there is this vague notion of a god who is killed, broken and comes to life again. Balder, Osiris, Dionysius, all the myths. Then among these Jews the thing really happens: the myth became fact.”

Lewis’ “myth became fact” conversation with J.R.R. Tolkien lasted until three in the morning. Joining them that night was another friend, Hugo Dyson, who also was a Christian. This conversation would turn out to be a pivotal step in Lewis’ journey to belief.

In a letter several days later, Lewis wrote:

Now what Dyson and Tolkien showed me was this: that if I met the idea of sacrifice in a Pagan story, I didn’t mind it at all: again, that if I met the idea of a god sacrificing himself to himself, I liked it very much and was mysteriously moved by it.... The reason was that in Pagan stories I was prepared to feel the myth as profound

and suggestive of meanings beyond my grasp.... Now the story of Christ is simply a true myth: a myth working on us in the same way as the others, but with this tremendous difference that *it really happened*.

FOR DISCUSSION

- Has someone had a role in your spiritual growth? How would you describe the part they played?

LOOK DEEPER

In October 1933, Tolkien recorded in his diary: "Friendship with Lewis compensates for much, and besides giving constant pleasure and comfort has done me much good from the contact with a man at once honest, brave, intellectual – a scholar, a poet and a philosopher – and a lover, at least after a long pilgrimage, of Our Lord."

18. "Of course the direct evangelical appeal 'come to Jesus' is still remarkably effective. I've seen it done. I can't do it. But those who can ought to do it with all their might. A Vicar once asked me to make a come to Jesus appeal at an RAF meeting during the war. I said, 'I wish I could make such an appeal. I can't. I wish I could. You do the heart stuff. I'll do the head stuff.'"

When it comes to evangelism, no one can do it all. As Paul told the Corinthians: "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow." Nor is there a single approach that will reach everyone. Some people may be reached by rational arguments like those found in Lewis' apologetic writings, others by an emotional appeal geared more toward the heart. In Lewis' comments, we might also be reminded of Paul's words in Ephesians that Christ gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists and some to be pastors and teachers – all in order to equip his people to serve.

FOR DISCUSSION

- What kind of appeal has the most impact on you? Are you moved by more than one kind?

LOOK DEEPER

Here Lewis claims that he cannot do "the heart stuff," but readers who have found his *Chronicles of Narnia* to be very moving might disagree with him. In Lewis' fictional works we find yet a third approach to evangelism – an appeal to the imagination.

19. "I do not think there is a demonstrative proof for Christianity nor for the existence of matter, or even the honesty of my oldest and dearest friend. I have faith that each is more probable than the alternative."

By *demonstrative* proof, Lewis means a deductive proof that is irrefutable. Of course, Lewis does not mean there is no evidence to support the Christian position – he devoted much of his apologetic writing presenting this evidence and suggesting that Christianity offers the best explanation for it. We see an example of this kind of thinking in his famous statement from chapter 10 of *Mere Christianity*: "If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world."

FOR DISCUSSION

- After years as an unbeliever, C.S. Lewis came to doubt atheism and materialism as the best explanations for not only our sense of right and wrong and our mysterious longing that nothing in this world can satisfy, but for all human experiences – including our experience of beauty, the order and design we see in the universe and our experience of God. How satisfying are the materialistic explanations for these experiences compared to the Christian explanation?

LOOK DEEPER

Rather than saying *Let me show you how you have it all wrong*, Lewis looks for common ground that we all share. By focusing on this common ground, Lewis affirms his readers' experiences – of beauty, of right and wrong, of unsatisfied longing – and then considers what is the best explanation for these experiences.

20. “Perhaps I didn’t choose. Perhaps, I was chosen. Perhaps your books, your letters, the prayers of my friends; were the Holy Ghost in action.”

Do we choose God, or does God choose us? Might it be both? Lewis asked these questions about his own conversion. In *Surprised by Joy* he writes: “Amiable agnostics will talk cheerfully about ‘man’s search for God.’ To me, as I then was, they might as well have talked about the mouse’s search for the cat.”

FOR DISCUSSION

- How would you answer the question of whether you chose God or God chose you?

LOOK DEEPER

Lewis reports that with help from the writings of Chesterton, Herbert and MacDonald, and through friends like Dyson and Tolkien, he was gradually (albeit reluctantly) brought to faith. Have you ever experienced the Holy Ghost “in action” through books, letters or prayers of friends?

21. It all hinges on Jesus. Is he who he says he is? If his statements are false, Christianity is of no importance. If true, it is of infinite importance. The one thing it cannot be is moderately important.

These statements come from an essay titled *Christian Apologetics* that Lewis wrote in 1945 to read to an assembly of Anglican priests and youth leaders. It was published posthumously in *God in the Dock*. In the essay Lewis reminds his audience: “One of the great difficulties is to keep before the audience’s mind the question of truth. They always think you are recommending Christianity not because it is *true* but because it is *good*.”

FOR DISCUSSION

- Have you ever had a discussion about faith where the topic gets turned away from whether Christianity is true and into a discussion about the amount of money some preacher gets paid each week or all the wrongs that may or may not have been committed in the name of Christ? How do you turn the topic back on the truth of Christianity?

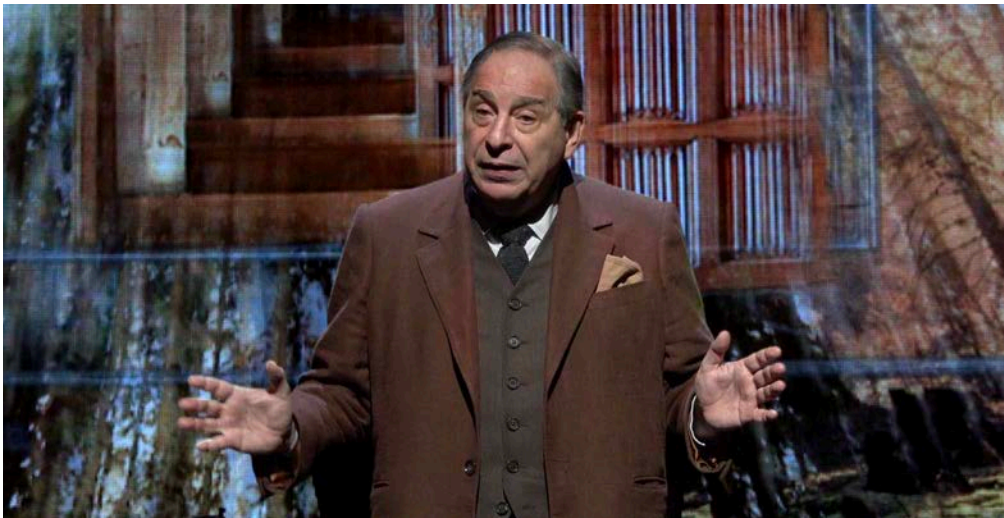
LOOK DEEPER

In *Christian Apologetics*, Lewis offered this positive word of encouragement to his audience: “Uneducated people are not irrational people. I have found that they will endure and can follow quite a lot of sustained argument if you go slowly. Often, indeed, the novelty of it (for they have seldom met it before) delights them.”

22. I often hear learned people say ‘I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher. I simply cannot accept his claim to be God.’ How could a great moral teacher say that the sort of things Jesus said?

Perhaps the most famous Lewis passage known today is the Liar, Lunatic or Lord Trilemma from in the chapter titled *The Shocking Alternative* in *Mere Christianity*. Here it is stated in full:

I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: “I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept His claim to be God.” That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic – on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg – or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us.



FOR DISCUSSION

- Have you ever talked with someone who said they were ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but only as that? How did you respond to them?

LOOK DEEPER

One of the most common objections to Lewis’ famous Liar, Lunatic or Lord Trilemma is the claim that one other alternative is left open: the possibility that Christ was only a *legend*, not a historical figure who actually said the things recorded in the Gospels. But notice that Lewis begins here with someone who is already past the legend option

and is saying *I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher*. This means that the person has already accepted the existence of a historical Jesus and has accepted the teachings ascribed to him as authentic – but wants to go no further.

23. I can tell you what will happen next. There will come a moment when there is a bit of trouble or bad news, or you are living among a lot of people who do not believe. All at once a blitz of emotion rises up.... Moments when it would be convenient if Christianity were not true. They are shot through with emotion that have nothing to do with reason.

I can tell you what will happen next. Here Lewis is speaking about feelings that will come and go. In the chapter on *Faith in Mere Christianity*, he writes: “Moods will change, whatever view your reason takes. I know that by experience. Now that I am a Christian, I do have moods in which the whole thing looks very improbable.... That is why Faith is such a necessary virtue.”

FOR DISCUSSION

- As a believer, do you sometimes have moods during which Christianity “looks very improbable?” How does your faith come to your aid in times like these? How is your faith more than just feelings?

LOOK DEEPER

In the chapter cited above, Lewis proposes this definition: “Faith, in the sense in which I am here using the word, is the art of holding on to things your reason has once accepted, in spite of your changing moods.” Then Lewis offers the following suggestion to train the habit of faith:

Make sure that, if you have once accepted Christianity, then some of its main doctrines shall be deliberately held before your mind for some time every day. That is why daily prayers and religious readings and churchgoing are necessary parts of the Christian life.... Neither this belief nor any other will automatically remain alive in the mind. It must be fed.

24. Prayer is request. The essence of request is that it may or may not be granted. We make requests all the time: we ask for salt, we ask a friend to feed the cat while we go on holiday, we ask a woman to marry us. Sometimes we get what we ask for and sometimes not.

This section comes from *The Efficacy of Prayer*, which was published in *The Atlantic Monthly* in January 1959 and later reprinted in *The World's Last Night*. The word *efficacy* means the ability to produce a desired or intended result. In the essay Lewis writes that the very question of whether prayer works may make it seem as if prayer “were magic, or a machine – something that functions automatically.” As a young boy, Lewis had prayed for his ailing mother, believing at the time that God was like a genie from a bottle who would grant his wish and then go away. When she died, he learned that prayer is not like a kind of cosmic vending machine where if we say just the right words in just the right way, God will always answer our prayer in the exact way we want.

FOR DISCUSSION

- Have you ever had a dramatic experience of the efficacy of prayer? How did it affect you?

LOOK DEEPER

In his entry on prayer written for *The C.S. Lewis Readers' Encyclopedia*, scholar Perry Bramlett claims: "It is quite possible that C. S. Lewis wrote more about prayer than any other subject" – perhaps because he felt that advice on the topic was so deeply needed.

In *The Screwtape Letters*, written early in Lewis' career, Wormwood is told: "The best thing, where it is possible, is to keep the patient from the serious intention of praying altogether." Should this fail, Wormwood is instructed to turn the patient's gaze away from God and toward himself and to watching his mind to see if he has been able to produce feelings there by the action of his will. Screwtape warns that if the patient is able to genuinely pray, to "the completely real, external, invisible Presence, there with him in the room," it is then that "the incalculable" may occur.

25. The advice given is "watch." I shall come like a thief. If the servant had known when his master would come, he would not have been found drunk in the house. But he didn't. Nor will we. So, we must be ready. "What if this is the world's last night?"

This passage is taken from the essay titled *The World's Last Night*, which originally appeared in the Winter 1952 issue of *Religion for Life* and now serves as the final selection in *The World's Last Night*. In this essay Lewis writes, "The doctrine of the Second Coming has failed, so far as we are concerned, if it does not make us realize that at every moment of every year in our lives Donne's question "What if this present were the world's last night?" is equally relevant.

FOR DISCUSSION

- In *The World's Last Night* Lewis quotes the statement Jesus makes in Matthew 24: "But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father." Despite this statement, from time to time, someone will announce that they somehow know the specific date when Jesus is going to come – and then will invariably be proven wrong. What is it in us that makes us want to know this day and hour that Christ has said no one knows?

LOOK DEEPER

In Philippians 2:7, we are told that Christ emptied himself, took on the form of a servant and was born in human likeness. Christ never ceased to be true God from true God, but at the same time he experienced the limitations of a human being and gave up the independent use of his divine attribute of being all-knowing, specifically knowing the day and hour of the Second Coming.

26. I used to think of heaven as a bribe. But Heaven offers nothing a mercenary soul desires. It's safe to tell the pure in heart that they shall see God. Because it is only the pure in heart that want to.

Lewis did not see eternal life as payment for correct behavior but as the natural consummation of a life of discipleship. In *The Weight of Glory*, he explains the difference this way:

We must not be troubled by unbelievers when they say that this promise of reward makes the Christian life a mercenary affair. There are different kinds of rewards. There is the reward which has no natural connection with the things you do to earn it and is quite foreign to the desires that ought to accompany those things. Money is not the natural reward of love; that is why we call a man mercenary if he marries a woman for the sake of her money. But marriage is the proper reward for a real lover, and he is not mercenary for desiring it.... Proper rewards are not simply tacked on to the activity for which they are given, they are the activity itself in consummation.

FOR DISCUSSION

• We must not be troubled by unbelievers when they say this promise of reward makes the Christian life a mercenary affair. Early on, believers may try to do what is right because of the promise of reward in Heaven or not do what is wrong because of the fear of punishment in Hell, but later, Christians will seek to do what is right simply to please God. Do you remember when you reached this stage?

LOOK DEEPER

In *The Great Divorce*, Lewis attempts to show how it is possible that someone might prefer Hell to Heaven. The character of George MacDonald explains, "There is always something they insist on keeping even at the price of misery. There is always something they prefer to joy."

27. We do not want merely to see beauty, though God knows that is bounty enough. We want to be united with the beauty we see, to pass into it, to receive it into ourselves, to bathe in it, to become part of it.

This passage about our longing to be united with beauty, to pass into it, and become part of it comes from Lewis' most famous essay, *The Weight of Glory*. Here we find Lewis' attempt to describe what is ultimately an inexpressible experience of the divine.

FOR DISCUSSION

• Have you ever had a mystical longing like the one that Lewis tries to depict here? How might you put into words what you were longing for?

LOOK DEEPER

Lewis came to identify this longing – which haunted and disturbed him, in the best sense, all his life – as a longing for heaven, our true home. At the end of *The Last Battle*, Lewis has Jewel the Unicorn give voice to his experience. Upon reaching the new Narnia, Jewel declares: "I have come home at last! This is my real country! I belong here. This is the land I have been looking for all my life, though I never knew it till now."



CONCLUSION

Poets' Corner at Westminster Abbey is home to gravestones and memorials that honor more than five centuries of Britain's most beloved writers. On Nov. 22, 2013 – the 50th anniversary of his death – C.S. Lewis took his place alongside such literary giants as Shakespeare, Chaucer and Dickens. His memorial is a testament to the contribution he has made in the lives of so many, helping them on their own journeys further up and further in.

Of all of Lewis' famous quotes, the following was chosen for the memorial inscription: "I believe in Christianity as I believe that the Sun has risen, not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else." Lewis' point is this: Only the Christian perspective allows us to properly see and understand the human condition.

What makes for a good life or a good friend? What makes for a good job or a good day? It is the Christian perspective that offers the best answers to these and to all of life's big questions. When viewed through the lens of Christianity, we see all these things properly. Like Lewis, we believe in Christianity not only because it is true, but also because it offers the best explanation for everything we experience in life – *by it we see everything else*.

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Among his many books are:

- *A Life Observed: A Spiritual Biography of C. S. Lewis* (Brazos 2013). Foreword by Douglas Gresham. Foreword Magazine Finalist for Best Biography of 2013.
- *Narnia Home: Lessons from the Other Side of the Wardrobe* (Abingdon 2015)
- *Tolkien: How an Obscure Oxford Professor Wrote The Hobbit and Became the Most Beloved Author of the Century* (Abingdon 2014). Winner: Christian Retailing's Best Award 2015, Biography Division