

C.S. Lewis's *The Screwtape Letters*
Compiled notes by Anna Dourgarian, Visitation Volunteer Intern Program

Ch. 1: Abstract thinking in general can help us find God by teaching us to attend to universal issues. Satan distracts us from God by the materialistic details of life.

“Remember, he is not, like you, a pure spirit. Never having been human (Oh that abominable advantage of the Enemy’s!) you don’t realize how enslaved they are to the pressure of the ordinary” (p.2).

Ch. 2: If we do not keep in mind the Church’s infinite holiness (which humbles us), we are susceptible to disdaining the Church and the lowly humans that make it up.

Ch. 3: Focusing too much on your soul can distract you from focusing on your actions.

Ch. 4: Improve prayer by using your body (kneeling), using the words Jesus taught us, focusing on God and not on ourselves, and acknowledging that God is beyond our comprehension.

“It is funny how mortals always picture us [devils] putting things into their minds: in reality our best work is done by keeping things out” (p. 16).

Ch. 5: War has its advantages. To divert your attention from yourself to serve others is a tribute to God, even if your cause is not Him. To meet death bravely is better than to self-indulge in your old age. The reminder of death diverts us from contented wordliness.

Ch. 6: Our appointed crosses are our present anxieties, not our future ones. If you sin, don’t blame it on an external object; if you are virtuous, don’t internalize (i.e., take pride in) it. You have both benevolence and malice in you: you can act out benevolence in your immediate environment and only entertain malice in the peripheries of your awareness (i.e., towards people you don’t know and never meet).

Ch. 7: Groups, such as the Church, are bad when they become factions that hate the outside world. One way to avoid a faction is never to make God a means to end (e.g., to social reform).

Ch. 8: The “law of Undulation” says that our feelings go through stages of troughs and peaks; for example, sometimes we feel close to God and sometimes far away. When we are close, God is babying us; when we feel far, God is letting us walk on our own so that we can grow. We prove our devotion to Him when we can’t feel Him but still intend to obey Him.

Ch. 9: Your resistance to temptation is lowest at the troughs. Although all pleasures originated from God, in excess they are sin because the more you have, the less you enjoy. Remember that the troughs do not last forever: do not despair.

Ch. 10: Your friends should reflect your morals. By spending some time in Christian circles and some time in sinful circles, you are being treacherous to both, not well-rounded.

Ch. 11: Laughter has good & bad types. 1) Joy (like Music and Heaven) can “[accelerate] the rhythm of celestial experience” (p.54). 2) Fun promotes charity, courage, and contentment but

can be distracting. 3) Jokes (especially British) strip sins of their severity, excusing them, even earning admiration, so beware. 4) Flippancy makes virtues or any serious topic ridiculous.

Ch. 12: If you have sins to ignore, you avoid God but pacify yourself by going through the Christian motions. Eventually you will do anything, even nothing, to keep from facing Him.

Ch. 13: Real pleasures (a good book, a walk in the park) remind you that worldly pleasures are nothing. Enjoy your favorite things and your own opinions, because these idiosyncrasies are the unique gifts that God gave you and loves about you.

Ch. 14: Humility is self-forgetfulness, not a low opinion of yourself.

Ch. 15: Godly pleasures are in the present; sin aims towards the future. Do what you can for the present and commit the rest to Heaven. Stockpile virtues needed for whatever the future brings.

Ch. 16: The “parochial organization” of churches is geographical and gathers people of different opinions; the “congregational organization” is factional where people go church-shopping and choose the one they like best. The second makes them critical; the first, receptive.

Ch. 17: Gluttony is getting what you want no matter how troublesome it is to others.

Ch. 18: Although “being in love” is stereotypically viewed as grounds for marriage and sex, it is a transient emotion. This stereotype causes two problems: 1) Premarital sex & broken marriages because people aren’t in love, and 2) Unwise marriages because they are in love. It is a parody on God’s version of Love, which is about unity. Marriage is for fidelity, fertility, and good will.

Ch. 19: The devil doesn’t believe God loves us.

Ch. 20: Marriage with the wrong person can drive you towards sin. The devil drives us towards the wrong person by creating trends of ridiculous sexual perfection.

Ch. 21: A sense of ownership of something, especially time, causes us to be ill-tempered when it is taken away. Rather, all things are gifts from God and to God. The pronoun “my” does not mean we have power over it but that we are in relationship with it.

Ch. 22: God loves pleasure. A pleasant house is one of music and silence.

Ch. 23: A deep faith can be corrupted by an overemphasis of details like the “historical Jesus” or politics can corrupt a deep faith.

Ch. 24: Spiritual Pride is the belief that your group of Christians is better than nonbelievers when, in reality, you are still ignorant and faulted yourself.

Ch. 25: While change is pleasurable, you may grow addicted to novelty, which opens doors to greed, gluttony, vulnerability to trends, and blindness to constant truth.

Ch. 26: There are subtleties to Unselfishness. Women understand it as “taking trouble for others,” while men understand it as “not giving trouble to others.” If two people are Unselfish, they make unnecessary sacrifices begrudgingly, end up doing something neither likes at all, and are smugly satisfied with their own “virtue.”

Ch. 27: God wants you to make penitentiary prayers. He answers them before you make them because He knows that you’re going to ask. This does not question our free will, because “to watch a man doing something is not to make him do it.”

Ch. 28: Satan wants you to live a long life so he has more time to make you a sinner. In the words of Emmanuel Kant in his “Critique of Pure Reason,” where Virtue is concerned, “experience is the mother of illusion.”

Ch. 29: God allows danger to exist because it requires us to call on the virtue of courage. Cowardice is the only vice that humans truly hate. Beware of fear, though, which breeds hate.

Ch. 30: Fatigue can weaken our resolve to virtue. Also, beware of that version of reality in which everything bad is “the way it *really* is” and everything good is a mere sentiment that covers up a dark core.