
THE SCREWTAPE LETTERS STUDY GUIDE

OVERVIEW OF C.S. LEWIS AND THE *SCREWTAPE LETTERS*

C.S. Lewis (1898–1963) was a British writer, scholar, and Christian apologist. A professor at Oxford and later Cambridge, he is best known for works like *Mere Christianity*, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, and *The Screwtape Letters*. A former atheist, Lewis converted to Christianity in mid-life and used his literary gifts to defend and explore the Christian faith.

About the Work: *The Screwtape Letters* (1942) is a satirical series of 31 fictional letters from a senior demon, Screwtape, to his nephew Wormwood, a junior tempter. The book reveals the subtle and insidious strategies of spiritual warfare from a diabolical point of view. Lewis wrote it to expose the hidden dangers Christians face in daily life—often more from distraction and pride than overt evil.

Study Guide by Letter (1–31)

Each entry includes:

- **Theme**
 - **Key Quote**
 - **Analysis**
 - **Reflection Question**
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Letter 1 – Distraction & Materialism

- **Theme:** Use of mundane life to prevent deep thought
- **Quote:** “It is funny how mortals always picture us as putting things into their minds: in reality our best work is done by keeping things out.”
- **Analysis:** Hell’s strategy is not blatant evil but distraction—keeping the Patient from thinking seriously about truth.
- **Reflection Question:** What are some “ordinary distractions” that prevent us from deeper reflection?

Letter 2 – Hypocrisy in the Church

- **Theme:** Using other Christians’ flaws to disillusion the Patient
- **Quote:** “When he gets to his pew and looks round him he sees just that selection of his neighbours whom he has hitherto avoided.”
- **Analysis:** Screwtape suggests using disappointment in the Church as a way to weaken faith.
- **Reflection Question:** How have you dealt with disappointment in the Church or other believers?

Letter 3 – Family Tensions

- **Theme:** Domestic irritation as spiritual sabotage
- **Quote:** “Keep his mind on the inner life; he thinks his conversion is something inside him and his attention is therefore chiefly turned... to the states of his own mind.”
- **Analysis:** Pride and self-centeredness often show up most in family life.
- **Reflection Question:** How might we unknowingly nurture spiritual pride or relational resentment?

Letter 4 – Prayer as a Problem

- **Theme:** Undermining sincere prayer
- **Quote:** “Teach them to estimate the value of each prayer by their success in producing the desired feeling.”
- **Analysis:** Encourages emotionalism in prayer rather than trust and humility.
- **Reflection Question:** How do your expectations shape your experience of prayer?

Letter 5 – War and Fear

- **Theme:** War’s double edge for temptation
- **Quote:** “We want him to be in the maximum uncertainty, so that his mind will be filled with contradictory pictures of the future.”
- **Analysis:** War can provoke both courage and despair—hell prefers anxiety to resolve.
- **Reflection Question:** How does fear affect your ability to trust God?

Letter 6 – Anxiety and the Future

- **Theme:** Preoccupation with the unknown
- **Quote:** “The duty of planning tomorrow’s work is today’s duty... but the duty exists for the present.”
- **Analysis:** Screwtape encourages future-focused anxiety instead of present obedience.
- **Reflection Question:** What helps you live more in the present rather than in worry?

Letter 7 – Politics as Distraction

- **Theme:** Diverting religious devotion into political ideology
- **Quote:** “Let him begin by treating patriotism or pacifism as a part of his religion.”
- **Analysis:** Screwtape wants the Patient to confuse faith with political fervor.
- **Reflection Question:** How do you keep your faith primary in a politically charged environment?

Letter 8 – Spiritual Dryness

- **Theme:** Using the “troughs” in spiritual life
- **Quote:** “He cannot ‘tempt’ to virtue as we do to vice.”
- **Analysis:** God uses seasons of dryness for spiritual growth, while demons see it as opportunity.
- **Reflection Question:** Have you experienced a “trough” in your faith? What came of it?

Letter 9 – Sensual Temptation in the Trough

- **Theme:** Exploiting low points for pleasure-seeking
- **Quote:** “The attacks of the Enemy do not tempt a man to give up virtue for sin but to use virtue as an excuse for sin.”
- **Analysis:** Temptation often comes dressed as comfort or self-care.
- **Reflection Question:** How can good desires become distorted?

Letter 10 – Friendship and Worldliness

- **Theme:** Using social status and desire for approval
- **Quote:** “He will be silent when he ought to speak and laugh when he ought to be silent.”
- **Analysis:** Peer pressure is spiritual warfare.
- **Reflection Question:** How has the desire to fit in shaped your behavior?

Letter 11

- **Theme:** Laughter and Flippancy
- **Key Quote:** “Among flippant people the joke is always assumed to have been made.”
- **Analysis:** Humor can be wholesome, but flippancy dulls the soul.
- **Reflection:** How can humor enrich your life without becoming cynicism?

Letter 12

- **Theme:** Gradual Drift from God
- **Key Quote:** “Indeed the safest road to Hell is the gradual one.”
- **Analysis:** The enemy works through slow compromise, not dramatic rebellion.
- **Reflection:** What subtle habits or shifts concern you spiritually?

Letter 13

- **Theme:** God's Grace and Rescue
- **Key Quote:** “He really loves the hairless bipeds He has created.”
- **Analysis:** A rare moment of hope—the Patient reconnects with real beauty and prayer.
- **Reflection:** When have beauty and joy helped you reconnect with God?

Letter 14

- **Theme:** False Humility vs. True Humility
- **Key Quote:** “Humility is not thinking less of yourself but thinking of yourself less.”
- **Analysis:** Hell encourages either pride in humility or shame—never true humility.
- **Reflection:** How do you understand and practice true humility?

Letter 15

- **Theme:** Present vs. Future
- **Key Quote:** “The Present is the point at which time touches eternity.”
- **Analysis:** God meets us in the present; demons push us to live in the past or future.
- **Reflection:** What habits help you stay grounded in today?

Letter 16

- **Theme:** Church-Hopping and Division
- **Key Quote:** “A search for a ‘suitable’ church makes the man a critic where the Enemy wants him to be a pupil.”
- **Analysis:** Demons want us focused on preferences, not worship or truth.
- **Reflection:** What drives your view of church—preference or purpose?

Letter 17

- **Theme:** Gluttony of Delicacy
- **Key Quote:** “She is a positive terror to hostesses and servants.”
- **Analysis:** Gluttony isn’t just about quantity—it’s about demanding what we want.
- **Reflection:** Where do you see subtle entitlement in your habits?

Letter 18

- **Theme:** Marriage and Lust
- **Key Quote:** “The Enemy described a married couple as ‘one flesh.’”
- **Analysis:** Demons twist love into appetite, severing sex from covenant.
- **Reflection:** What does our culture get wrong about love and marriage?

Letter 19

- **Theme:** Real Love vs. Self-Interest
- **Key Quote:** “The Enemy really loves the little vermin.”
- **Analysis:** Hell can’t grasp love that doesn’t seek personal benefit.
- **Reflection:** How do you experience and practice self-giving love?

Letter 20

- **Theme:** Lust and Idealized Images
- **Key Quote:** “He can be induced to live... in a world of unrealities.”
- **Analysis:** Hell uses fantasy to feed dissatisfaction with real people.
- **Reflection:** What helps you ground your desires in reality?

Letter 21

- **Theme:** Ownership and Entitlement
- **Key Quote:** “They will find out in the end... that their time was never their own.”
- **Analysis:** Tempting the Patient to view everything as “mine.”
- **Reflection:** What things do you wrongly feel entitled to?

Letter 22

- **Theme:** Sensory Experience and Spiritual War

- **Key Quote:** “All extremes... except extreme devotion to the Enemy, are to be encouraged.”
- **Analysis:** Overindulgence or obsession with experience can erode faith.
- **Reflection:** Where do you chase experience over spiritual substance?

Letter 23

- **Theme:** Modernist Theology
- **Key Quote:** “The historical Jesus is always to be encouraged.”
- **Analysis:** Watering down doctrine keeps the Patient from real faith.
- **Reflection:** How do you discern truth in a world of vague spirituality?

Letter 24

- **Theme:** Spiritual Pride
- **Key Quote:** “He is not thinking about doing good; he is thinking about being good.”
- **Analysis:** Pride in spiritual progress is one of hell’s favorite tricks.
- **Reflection:** When are you most tempted to compare your spirituality to others’?

Letter 25

- **Theme:** Familiarity and Innovation
- **Key Quote:** “The horror of the Same Old Thing.”
- **Analysis:** A restless desire for novelty can distract from timeless truth.
- **Reflection:** What makes you impatient with the ordinary in your spiritual life?

Letter 26

- **Theme:** Unspoken Grudges and Passive Aggression
- **Key Quote:** “He can be made to feel quite virtuous for not saying what he is thinking.”
- **Analysis:** Hidden bitterness corrodes relationships.
- **Reflection:** Where do you need to bring peace into conflict?

Letter 27

- **Theme:** Distracted Prayer
- **Key Quote:** “The best thing is to let sleeping worms lie.”
- **Analysis:** A focus on secondary things keeps us from real intimacy with God.
- **Reflection:** How do you center your prayer life on God Himself?

Letter 28

- **Theme:** Fear of Death
- **Key Quote:** “How disastrous for us is the continual remembrance of death.”
- **Analysis:** Awareness of mortality can lead to repentance; demons prefer denial.
- **Reflection:** How does a Christian view of death change the way we live?

Letter 29

- **Theme:** Cowardice and False Bravery
- **Key Quote:** “Courage is not simply one of the virtues but the form of every virtue at the testing point.”
- **Analysis:** Real virtue must stand under pressure.
- **Reflection:** Where is God calling you to courageous faith?

Letter 30

- **Theme:** Fatigue and Resilience
- **Key Quote:** “In the fatigue of battle, even a whisper of pride or resentment is a victory.”
- **Analysis:** When we are tired, small sins slip in easily.
- **Reflection:** What spiritual practices help you stay faithful under stress?

Letter 31

- **Theme:** Final Defeat of Hell
- **Key Quote:** “He got through so many temptations in the last hour alone!”
- **Analysis:** God’s grace triumphs. The Patient is lost to Hell—and saved by Heaven.
- **Reflection:** What gives you confidence in God’s saving power?