

# *Lifted Up*

Personal reflections concerning  
the writings of C. S. Lewis,  
the purpose of life,  
Christian values,  
and our Savior, Jesus Christ

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## Good Becomes Different

*“You cannot take all luggage with you on all journeys; on one journey even your right hand and your right eye may be among the things you have to leave behind. We are not living in a world where all roads are radii of a circle and where all, if followed long enough, will therefore draw gradually nearer and finally meet at the centre: rather in a world where every road, after a few miles, forks into two, and each of those into two again, and at each fork you must make a decision. Even on the biological level life is not like a river but like a tree. It does not move towards unity but away from it and the creatures grow further apart as they increase in perfection. Good, as it ripens, becomes continually more different not only from evil but from other good.”*

— *The Great Divorce*, Preface p.viii

From the carnal man's perspective it is easy to believe in the idea that all roads will lead to the same place: God is in charge; he is good; surely he will guide me to a place that is good, regardless of my foolishness and imperfections. If we are not careful, the carnal man will be the one that leads us through life—and to our ultimate destiny.

I know there are times when I want to find excuses. I want to see the blame for bad things cast away from myself. I certainly do not want to hear or know that some choice of mine has brought about an undesirable consequence.

But choice and responsibility for choices are eternal laws—principles that have existed and will exist as long as the Almighty God that upholds them exists. The adversary would have God's children deny this (and any other truth for that matter). He wants us to be blind to truth and to follow his will to destruction.

That is why choice is so important, and Lewis makes that vividly clear. The location whereat we will end up will be the one that we ourselves have chosen—and we will be able to blame no one else. But this is not a simple, one-time decision. The path we are taking is not chosen once, but at each crossroad or fork that we come to. This is such a significant truth that I fear I am not realizing its full importance. I am faced with thousands of choices each day. In one ear I hear the promptings of "dear old uncle Screwtape." In the other ear I hear the voice of the Spirit. And before each of these moments pass, I make a choice, either to the one side or to the other.

It would be terrifying to think that at the judgment bar my fate would be ruled based on my choices alone. The hope lies in knowing that Christ is there to be my

Savior and to help me become greater than my mistakes.

Lewis says that we must leave things behind. I understand this to mean that we may have to leave some things behind in order to enter certain places. I cannot enter “the place of no thorns” if I am carrying a thorn, for in entering the place I would destroy its existence. In the same way, if I am to enter the presence of God the Father, I must meet the conditions of that place; I cannot dwell in the place of perfection if I have not been made perfect. And this perfection can only be gained through Christ.

† † †

Previously I had supposed that perfection (or becoming as Christ and the Father) meant that we would become exactly like Them in every way. Not only would we reflect their attributes of kindness, knowledge, and power (etc.), I assumed that perfection would extend across all attributes.

Lewis states that “good, as it ripens, becomes continually more different not only from evil but from other good.” This makes sense because if we were to become exactly like God in every way, then we would seem to lose our individuality, which (I thought) was an important part of our existence. He explains this more thoroughly in the following:

*“Imagine a lot of people who have always lived in the dark. You come and try to describe to them what light is like. You might tell them that if they come into the light that same light would fall on them all and they would all reflect it and thus become what we call visible. Is it not quite possible that they would imagine that, since they were all receiving the same light, and all reacting to it in the same way (i.e., all reflecting it), they would all look alike? Whereas you and I*

*know that the light will in fact bring out, or show up how different they are” (Mere Christianity, 188).*

This passage was very illuminating to me. First, it showed me that I simply may not have the power to understand until I have actually experienced “the light.” Secondly, this example helped me to see that the light of God will enhance our individual and unique characteristics so that we become ourselves even more.

He continues: *“There are no real personalities anywhere else [than in God]. Until you have given up your self to Him you will not have a real self. Sameness is to be found most among the most ‘natural’ men, not among those who surrender to Christ” (190).*

In Christ we will find fullness. We will be complete as individuals and as children of God.

## *Personal Responsibility*

*“We all want progress, but if you’re on the wrong road, progress means doing an about-turn and walking back to the right road; in that case, the man who turns back soonest is the most progressive.”*

*— Mere Christianity*

In chapter 2 of *The Great Divorce*, Lewis talks about “the tousle-headed poet.” He was one of the people from the Gray Town—the lowest level of the afterlife. All he could talk about was how everyone had caused him problems—every bad thing about his situation or his past was the fault of someone else. It never occurred to him that some of his own choices may have had an effect on where he was standing in his eternal journey.

I was jolted when I first began to understand the concept of personal responsibility. We are accountable for the choices that we make, and we cannot blame our mistakes on other people or other things. We humans have a tendency to make excuses and to cast blame. But ultimately this will do us no good, and it will definitely do harm. Having personal responsibility is being able to recognize that our choices are our destiny and that no one or no thing can take that away. If we succeed, it is because of our doings, and if we fail, that is ours to claim as well. (And I am not trying to take away from the grace of Christ. Our success will be that we chose to allow Him to make us a success.)

It is not that I thought the opposite of this before, but more that I just hadn’t thought about it. I had not realized—or it had not become real to me.

Personal responsibility is a very important step in human development. A person who is unable to learn this lesson is not going to be able to tap into the powerful force of justice (which one must do in order to tap into the power of mercy, and both of these eternal laws are part of God Himself—they are among his many perfect attributes [see *Lectures On Faith*]). Recognizing that we *must* take responsibility for our actions is an important

part of repenting and of drawing toward God. In fact, it seems that if a man will never take this burden upon him, then he will be stopped in his progression; he will be damned.

Now on a more personal note: God has given me the gift of choice. He has made me the master of my own vessel. He has allowed me to steer my own course to whatever horizon I choose.

And what shall I do with this? Will I be able to blame my course on the wind or the fog? Surely things would have been different without them. But, no—in spite of their presence I always retained and do retain my power to set the sails and angle the rudder. And with an eye of hope—with a certain amount of vision—one can sail successfully through any storm, through any tempest.

And what is that vision of hope? My hope is in Christ.

I have made some mistakes which I regret. I have done things that I knew I should not do. When I recognize this, it makes me want to give up. Sometimes I believe that I cannot set my course straight again. But amid this darkness of life's sea, I can see a flicker of hope.

“I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life” (John 8:12).

Christ is my lighthouse on the shore. He is the hope that guides me forward. And with that light, I know I can prevail through any storm. I will *choose* to do right. I will choose to follow that light until it leads me home. I will choose this course in spite of fears.



## *Screwtape's Deceptions*

*“You will say that these are very small sins; and doubtless, like all young tempters, you are anxious to be able to report spectacular wickedness. But do remember, the only thing that matters is the extent to which you separate the man from the Enemy. It does not matter how small the sins are provided that their cumulative effect is to edge the man away from the Light and out into Nothing. Murder is no better than cards if cards can do the trick. Indeed the safest road to Hell is the gradual one—the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts...”*

— *The Screwtape Letters*, 60

*The Screwtape Letters* is a fictional series of letters written from a demon named Screwtape. He is instructing his nephew, a less-experienced demon named Wormwood, in the art of temptation and deception. Uncle Screwtape guides Wormwood to how he can best lead his “patient” down to Hell. The tactics that he suggests seem very clever, yet they clearly come from Satan. The surprising part is when people recognize that they themselves have fallen prey to one particular deception or another.

After reading just a few chapters of *The Screwtape Letters*, I am amazed at how gullible I am in regard to the temptations and lies of Satan.

Just a few minutes ago, I had a little squabble with my brother—over silly things. I felt like he (my brother) just wanted to put me down and make himself seem right. I did not consider that he may have been feeling that way about me. I did not consider that maybe his intentions weren't as hostile as I perceived them. I just believed the selfish assumptions that popped into my consciousness.

Really, there is a lot of good in this world. Screwtape and his friends (though I use the term loosely) will try to get us to see only the bad and to make decisions based upon this foggy perspective.

I have read *The Screwtape Letters* once before. I remember after having read it I had a sharper ability to detect these lies and a stronger desire to do so. Apparently it faded a little between that reading and this. However, I again resolve to look at life from eyes guided by the Spirit and to do my best to see the good and the God-given blessings in life—in daily situations and in the people I encounter.

Screwtape and the temptations of devils are very real.

He is as real as anything that is “real,” and sometimes seems more so. By this I mean he seems more real than the walls around me, and the grass and trees in the distance, and the flesh that I interact with when I speak with a friend—because these will all deteriorate with all other corruptible things. It seems these devils would hold more weight in the eternal sense than these temporal things.

And the only way for me to conquer such a formidable foe is through the strength of God. One thing that I know surely and clearly is that I am nothing—that I am in a “worthless and fallen state.” I know that I need help from God and that I cannot make it on my own. It is easy to see that someone else is being tricked by their devil and doing things that to you are obviously wrong. But for some reason it is hard for me to realize when my own devil is tricking me into following him.

The fact that Screwtape or Wormwood or whoever has been assigned to me is out of my sight and beyond my “reality” is what really scares me. That is what seems to give him so much power. He is like a phantom that is engaging in a constant surprise attack, against which I must learn to build a defense, in spite of the fact that there is currently no visible attack. I fear that I will be like a sentry who grows tired of seeing no attacking enemies and so lets his guard down. That is the real lesson: never let your guard down. If there is one thing you can count on, it is that the adversary will never quit trying to bring you down.

On the other hand, perhaps this super-reality in which this devil lives can be used to my advantage. I, following the example of the great Example, can simply command Satan to “get behind me”—I can block this

devil out of my mind and heart. Then by overcoming sins and temptations I am shoving this devil into a realm which doesn't merge with the realm I am in.

The best defensive position I can have is a firm resolve to always be aware of temptations and the need to ignore and overcome them. I must also rely on the strength of the Lord to lend me the power to do so. I must always have my guard up, clothed in the armor of God.

## *Out of the Atmosphere*

*“Most people, if they had really learned to look into their own hearts, would know that they do want, and want acutely, something that cannot be had in this world... 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.”*

— *Mere Christianity*, 119

I am amazed at this idea of Lewis'. I think of the desires that I have felt that have not been realized. The most typical one is the feeling I get when I look at the stars and the moon. I love just gazing into the heavens. I have sat for hours just watching and wanting. Wanting what? I do not know. When I see the moon, I have a desire to go there to see what it is like. When I see the stars in all their majesty, I think that there is a part of me out there. The desire is something like flying a million miles an hour out of the atmosphere. And once you get there? I don't know. I think this goes to show that the desire is something I do not understand. It is a desire *for* something I do not understand—something I cannot comprehend. Lewis explains it beautifully here.

Jacob closed his account by saying, “our lives passed away like as it were unto us a dream, we being a lonesome and a solemn people, wanderers...” (Jacob 7:26). His poetic outlook is very insightful. We do not belong here on this fallen earth. It will not be our permanent home. We are strangers in this world. There is a home that belongs to us, and it is out there somewhere.

I believe I will find it in heaven.

† † †

28 September 2004—

I woke up in the middle of my nighttime rest. I remained still. I opened my eyes to a clear view of the moon through my window. It shone brightly through thick clouds. I stared, soaking up its magnificence. Then I whispered, “Thank you, God...” I just gazed for a few moments in awe at its beauty.

I had a particularly rough day, but when I woke to this

view I had a stillness inside—a tranquility.

It was a spiritual sensation that I doubt I can describe. I felt joy—so happy in my heart, so calm in my mind. All the troubles of that day were dissolved. I looked to the sky, and I knew there was something that I needed to take from there in order to feel this feeling completely, but I did not know what to take or how to take it.

Then, as if there was someone close to me I said, “I can see heaven...”

“That’s my heaven, right there.”

I am not in heaven right now. But at times I am close enough to feel it, or *see* it. Seeing it is not the ultimate reward or the fullness of joy, but the sight of it gives hope. Knowing there is a heaven allows the hope to exist and even to flourish.

It is out there. And it is waiting for us.



## *A Biography of C. S. Lewis*

Clive Staples Lewis was born in Belfast, Ireland, on November 29, 1898. At age four he insisted on being called Jack—after his dog which was killed. His friends knew him by this name throughout his life. He was taught by private tutors in his youth.

After his mother died of cancer in 1908, he attended Wynyard School (in Watford, Hertfordshire, England), Campbell College (in Belfast), and Cherbourg House (in Malvern, Worcestershire, England). While attending the latter (at age thirteen), he abandoned Christianity, his childhood faith, and turned to atheism.

Having been awarded a scholarship, he attended University College, Oxford, in 1916. He enlisted in the British Army the following year. He served in the Third Battalion, Somerset Light Infantry, in the midst of World War I. He fought at the front in the battle of the Somme and was wounded in the Battle of Arras. He was discharged in 1918 and returned to his studies soon thereafter.

Lewis was a fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford, from 1925 to 1954, and later became the first Professor

of Medieval and Renaissance Literature at the University of Cambridge (and a fellow of Magdalene College, Cambridge). He returned to Christianity in 1931. He then became a faithful member of the Church of England.

While at Oxford, he was a member of a literary society called The Inklings (which included J. R. R. Tolkien, Charles Williams, and Owen Barfield). Throughout his career, he wrote many books concerning Christian theology. Among Lewis' favorite authors were W. B. Yeats and George MacDonald.

He met and married Joy Gresham, an American, in the late 1950s. She died of cancer soon thereafter. Lewis began to have serious health problems in 1961, including kidney failure and a heart attack. He passed away on November 22, 1963, in his home, The Kilns, in Headington (near Oxford). He is buried in the churchyard of the Holy Trinity Church in Headington.



C. S. Lewis' grave. May 2006.