

The background is a complex, abstract composition of warm, organic shapes. It features a central, bright yellow and white area that fades into darker, textured brown and orange tones towards the edges. The overall effect is reminiscent of a microscopic view of biological tissue or a close-up of a textured surface like wood or stone, with intricate, vein-like patterns and a sense of depth and movement.

Radio Theatre's  
*The Screwtape Letters*  
discussion guide



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## Introduction:

C.S. Lewis and Douglas Gresham

Lewis wrote, “There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them.” How can you listen to this production and avoid falling into either trap? Which error do you think is more common in our culture? In the church? Why?

Lewis thought his book, which describes temptation from the enemy’s point of view, would be useful as well as entertaining. How might it be useful to the following people? How might it be useful to you?

- a Christian who feels immune to temptation
- a person who feels guilty about a bad habit
- someone who thinks the devil is a force, not a person
- someone who grew up fearing the power of demons
- a Christian who’s tired of battling temptation



## Letter 1:

The Eternal Benefits of Jargon

How would you describe the personalities of Screwtape and Wormwood? In your imagination, how do they look?

How do you think Screwtape would describe Wormwood’s “patient”? What “doctoring” do you suppose the two demons hope to do?

Which of the following Screwtape strategies do you think work as well today as they did when the book was written? Which do you most need to watch out for? Why?

- convincing people that “real life” is just a stream of sensory experiences
- keeping people from thinking about their mortality
- instead of asking whether something is right or wrong, asking whether it’s “practical” or “outworn” or “contemporary”
- disconnecting thinking from doing
- distracting people with bacon sandwiches



## Letter 2:

### The Church: Our Ally

Why was Screwtape hopeful about reclaiming Wormwood's patient? What role did he think the church could play? If the devil wants you to become disenchanted with Christianity by being disappointed with the church, which of the following might he call your attention to? How would you counteract that strategy?

- scandals involving church leaders
- the shortcomings of other churchgoers
- the dullness of some sermons and songs
- the differences between the invisible church and the visible one
- the overall "ridiculousness" of church life

How would you describe Screwtape's view of "human vermin"? If this reflects the devil's attitude, how has he managed to appeal to so many people? Why does he seem to work so hard to tempt you instead of just ignoring you?

## Letter 3:

### Daily Pinpricks

What tempting opportunities might Screwtape find in the following situations? How might he make the most of them?

- A husband is bothered by his wife's weight gain.
- A wife finds her husband's frequent swearing intolerable.
- A parent is annoyed by his or her child's seeming lack of ambition.
- A child is irritated by his mother's tendency to nag by quoting Bible verses.

Why would Screwtape recommend keeping the "patient's" prayers for his mother as spiritual as possible? Could the following actions actually serve the devil's purposes under some circumstances? If so, how?

- fasting
- tithing
- performing on a church drama team
- burning your teenager's music CDs



## Letter 4: The Painful Subject of Prayer

Which of the following prayer problems do you think causes the most trouble for you? What solutions to these problems did C.S. Lewis imply in this letter?

- trying to create an emotional state when you pray
- praying to something you've made rather than the One who made you
- envisioning God as someone He isn't
- thinking that your posture or energy level are irrelevant

When the following Bible characters prayed, did they get more than they bargained for, or less? Are you willing to pray for anything you want to, even though you don't know what might happen as a result? Why or why not?

- Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36-46)
- Solomon praying for wisdom (2 Chronicles 1:7-12)
- Daniel praying three times a day (Daniel 6)
- Job crying out for help (Job 30:20-31)

## Letter 5: War

There's an old saying: "There are no atheists in foxholes." Would Screwtape agree? Why or why not? Would he quote this saying with glee, regret, or some other feeling?

Screwtape believed war provided a special opportunity to tempt humans in certain ways. If you'd lived in England during World War II, what temptations might have been especially appealing to you? To what temptations might you be vulnerable under each of the following conditions? Why?

- a worldwide economic recession
- a deadly flu pandemic
- a terrorist attack
- a five-year drought
- losing your job
- watching your house burn down
- locking your keys in the car



## Letter 6: The Art of Redirection



When you face uncertainty, how do you tend to react?

- by praying
- by thinking about the terrible things that might happen
- by eating too much
- by getting irritated at other people
- other \_\_\_\_\_

How do you think God feels about that reaction? If you could change one thing about your reaction, what would it be?

Why wasn't Screwtape interested in getting people to hate distant enemies? Is it easier to hate those who are close and to be charitable toward those who are far away, or vice versa? Would Jesus approve of either scenario? Why or why not?

## Letter 7: Patriotism or Pacifism

If you were to ask most people in your church whether patriotism or pacifism was the more godly position, what do you think most of them would say? How might they explain their answer? How might Screwtape view their explanation?

Screwtape recommended convincing humans that faith isn't an end, but just a means to an end—and that it's part of a "larger" cause like patriotism or pacifism. Could any of the following be examples of that mindset? If so, how and under what circumstances?

- passing out "voter guides" in church
- lobbying for more government hunger relief aid to other nations
- displaying your country's flag on the church platform
- praying that your country will win a war
- inviting a political candidate to speak in your church
- running for president or prime minister
- telling your child that yours is a "Christian nation"

## Letter 8: The Law of Undulation

How do you tend to respond to the ups and downs of your spiritual journey?

- by cherishing the ups and trying to ignore the downs
- by attempting to have more ups and fewer downs
- by avoiding extremes of all kinds
- by reminding yourself that neither will last
- other \_\_\_\_\_

Do you think your responses are unusual? Why or why not?

Screwtape tells Wormwood that God wants to fill the universe with little replicas of Himself who voluntarily choose to love and serve Him. Why does that disgust Screwtape? How are Satan's plans for you different from God's? How do you feel about that?

## Letter 9: Trough Periods

How might each of the following be tempting to someone going through a "trough" period? What would make you less vulnerable to these "cravings" during those times?

- gambling
- shopping
- Internet pornography
- gossip
- having an affair
- judging others

Which of these reactions to a trough period do you think would please Screwtape the most? Which would please God the most? Which will you choose when you enter your next "valley," or will you wait until it happens and react according to your feelings at the time? Why?

- "God has made me a byword to everyone, a man in whose face people spit" (Job 17:6).
- "But I trust in you, O LORD; I say, You are my God" (Psalm 31:14).
- "What a heavy burden God has laid on men! I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind" (Ecclesiastes 1:13b-14).
- "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24b)
- "Lord, save us! We're going to drown!" (Matthew 8:25b)

## Letter 10:

### Potential Benefits from New Acquaintances

Which of the following trends from C.S. Lewis' day do you think are still influencing people now? Do they affect you? Why or why not?

- calling values like chastity and sobriety "puritanical"
- being superficially intellectual
- living a double life
- taking a skeptical and cynical view
- feeling superior to those who are less "complex"
- accepting a friend's questionable behavior in order to avoid offending him

If you were Wormwood, where would you encourage your "patient" to look for friends and romantic relationships? Why?

- bars
- church
- cocktail parties
- quilting bees
- school
- online
- political organizations
- sci-fi conventions
- other \_\_\_\_\_



## Letter 11:

### Joy, Fun, the Joke Proper, and Flippancy

Which of the following do you think is the biggest problem? Why?

- Christians who think laughter is probably a sin
- people who joke about hell
- spouses who make sarcastic remarks about each other
- pastors whose sermons consist mostly of funny stories

Which of the following do you think Screwtape would find useful? Which would he ignore? Which would he find dangerous? Why?

- late-night talk show monologues
- making prank phone calls
- posters of chimpanzees saying “funny” things
- a comedy album with a “parental advisory” sticker
- a Christian comedian who performs in churches
- a book that claims to contain “the world’s dirtiest jokes”
- VeggieTales DVDs
- YouTube videos of people making embarrassing mistakes



## Letter 12: Great Results from Small Sins

How do you think Screwtape might change the following quotations to sum up the message of this letter?

- “The road to hell is paved with good intentions.”
- “Sin boldly.”
- “Little things mean a lot.”
- “The devil is in the details.”
- “You’re innocent until proven guilty.”

Why did Screwtape encourage “small” sins instead of “spectacular” ones? How could each of the following help a Christian whose guilt has caused him or her to feel far from God?

- making a list of the sins
- repenting and asking God’s forgiveness
- confessing the sins to another person
- believing 1 John 1:9
- reading the story of Peter’s betrayal of Jesus and subsequent restoration (John 18:25-27; 21:15-19)
- other \_\_\_\_\_

## Letter 13: Pains and Pleasures

Did it surprise you to learn that Screwtape thought it dangerous for humans to do things for the sheer enjoyment of it? Why or why not? Have you ever known any Christians who seemed to have the same attitude? How might they feel about this letter?

According to Screwtape, the devil tries to disguise “vanity, bustle, irony, and expensive tedium” as genuine pleasures. Into which of those categories would you put the following? If any of them could be genuine pleasures, how might they bring you closer to God?

- going to a very fancy restaurant because movie stars go there
- taking a community college course in landscaping
- giving your friends a witty but scathing review of a local theater production
- playing golf with your boss
- taking care of babies in the church nursery
- driving 700 miles in one summer to see all your daughter’s soccer games
- entering a hot-dog-eating contest



## Letter 14: Extracting Pride from Humility

How is self-forgetfulness different from having a low opinion of yourself? Why is God pleased with one and not the other?

If God wants you to rejoice in your neighbor’s talents and accomplishments as much as you would in your own, how could you obey Him in each of the following situations?

- Your best friend’s son got a \$5,000 college scholarship; your son got a “Most Improved in P.E.” certificate.
- Your son got the scholarship; your friend’s son got the certificate.
- You and your sister both brought peach pies to the church potluck; your sister’s pie was gone in five minutes, but nobody touched yours.
- You and your brother ran for positions on the church board; both of you lost.

## Letter 15: The Future

When you were growing up, what were your hopes, fears, and expectations about being the age you are now? Did they affect your relationship with God? If so, how? Do they affect your relationship with God now? If so, how?

What's one thing you hope will happen during the next three years? If it doesn't, how will you resist the temptation to be bitter about it? What's one thing you fear might happen during the next three years? How could you resist the temptation to be distracted by that fear?

## Letter 16: Church Hopping

If Jesus moved to your town, how do you think He would choose a church to attend? How long would He stay there? How might His attitude toward the church in general compare to yours?

If Screwtape targeted your church, which of the following do you think he would make his top priority? Why?

- tempting the pastor to steal money from the offering plate
- getting older and younger people to fight about worship styles
- helping the church down the road to look more successful than yours
- encouraging members of the congregation to ignore each other
- other \_\_\_\_\_

## Letter 17: Gluttony Through Delicacy

Do you think any of the following might be examples of gluttony? Why or why not? Would Screwtape agree?

- an all-you-can-eat buffet
- eating more or better food than most people in some countries can afford
- trying to break the world record for eating hard-boiled eggs
- eating a diet of only raw food
- sending back an overcooked pork chop in a restaurant
- throwing away leftover lasagna

What does it mean to be ruled by your stomach? Why does it have spiritual significance? How would you pray for a person who found himself or herself in the following situations?

- admitted to a hospital for treatment of an eating disorder like anorexia or bulimia
- gaining back the weight lost after “stomach stapling” surgery
- fired from a job due to alcoholism
- addicted to spending \$5 a day on gourmet coffees
- unable to please a spouse with his or her cooking

## Letter 18: Love and Marriage

Why does Screwtape sound so contemptuous when he says the phrase, “falling in love”? Should Christians take seriously the concept of falling in love? Why or why not? What about the idea of “falling out of love”?

If C.S. Lewis used Screwtape to address the topic of sexuality today, which of the following issues do you think he would include? What might he say about them?

- cohabitation
- pornography
- homosexuality
- abstinence campaigns
- HIV and AIDS
- sexual references in movies, TV, and music
- romance novels
- contraception
- modesty



## Letter 19: The Enemy Loves the Human Vermin

Why did Wormwood accuse Screwtape of heresy? If Wormwood follows through, do you think Screwtape will be convicted? Why or why not?

Read John 3:16. Does this verse explain why God so loved the world? Which of the following explanations, if any, makes the most sense to you? How could that affect your relationships with God and with other “human vermin”?

- God doesn’t “love” the world in the way we use the term; he just feels sorry that He’s allowed people to suffer so much.
- Because God created the world and its people, He feels protective of them.
- Since we’re created in God’s image, He sees a little of Himself in us.
- God sees our potential, not just the mess we’ve made of things.
- God wants relationships, and we’re the only earthly creatures who can choose to love Him.
- other \_\_\_\_\_

## Letter 20: The Terrestrial and Infernal Venus

Screwtape describes how society’s concepts of the ideal man and woman have changed over time. What would you say the ideal man and woman look and act like in our culture today? Is a certain kind of spiritual commitment part of that? How might that affect the way in which people choose a mate?

Which two of the following sexual traps do you think hamper the most Christians? What advice would you give someone who was caught in these traps?

- “falling in love” with someone who is superficially appealing but spiritually dangerous
- pining away for someone who’s married to someone else
- having an emotional affair
- having a physical affair
- being addicted to Internet pornography
- being promiscuous
- becoming obsessed with finding a husband or wife



## Letter 21: Mine!

Do you tend to get mad when something that “belongs” to you is taken away? Why or why not? If you apply the following statements, how might that response change next time you lose something that’s “yours”?

- “[Humans say] ‘My time is my own. . . . [But] it all comes as a pure gift.’”
- “‘My’ God [means] ‘the God on whom I have a claim for my distinguished services . . . .’”
- “Humans can’t use the word ‘mine’ in its fully possessive sense about anything.”

What problems can occur when someone believes in the following kinds of ownership? How could Screwtape and Wormwood make the most of those problems?

- my wife
- my boots
- my father
- my dog
- my country
- my teddy bear



## Letter 22: Love, Noise, and Becoming a Centipede

How would you describe Screwtape’s emotional state in this segment? Why does he feel so strongly about each of the following?

- the woman with whom Wormwood’s patient has fallen in love
- his belief that the “Enemy” is a “hedonist at heart”
- silence, music, and noise

Screwtape vows, “We will make the whole universe noise in the end.” Read John 10:10 and 1 Peter 5:8. What does the devil hope to accomplish in the world? How can remembering his goals help you to obey 1 Peter 5:9 next time you’re tempted?

In his addendum, Screwtape tries to explain away his temporary transformation into a centipede. How is the Christian’s transformation into a “new creation” (2 Corinthians 5:17) different?

## Letter 23: The "Historical Jesus"

Screwtape says the popular image of Jesus should be changed every 30 years or so. Which of the following do you think is most popular in your culture at the moment? How do you know? How does that affect Christians and others?

- Jesus as liberator of the oppressed
- Jesus as nonjudgmental advocate of tolerance
- Jesus as preserver of traditional morality
- Jesus as the ultimate role model for manhood
- Jesus as meek, mild philosopher
- Jesus as endorser of a political party
- other \_\_\_\_\_

Look at the six images of Jesus described in the previous question. In each case, what traits of the real Jesus are suppressed? What traits are exaggerated? What are three ways to ensure that your own image of Jesus isn't distorted?

## Letter 24: Spiritual Pride

Which of these thoughts express attitudes that would please Screwtape? Why?

- I don't know how I'd go on living if I weren't a Christian.
- Lost people can't help the way they act.
- Non-Christians don't know any better.
- Christians are happier than people who don't know the Lord.
- I only listen to Christian music.
- He's a pre-Christian.
- Christianity isn't a religion; it's a relationship.

Let's say you've been assigned to make a 30-second TV commercial. Your mission: to encourage people to consider Christianity. How will you do that without implying that Christians are special, superior to, or more moral than their unbelieving counterparts?



## Letter 25: Merely Christian



How would you explain the concept of “mere Christianity” to an eight-year-old who was growing up in the church? To an adult who’d left the church “because of all the fights and hypocrisy”?

Screwtape wanted to convince humans that “mere” Christianity is dull and must be kept fresh by combining it with various forms of novelty. Which, if any, of the following do you think are examples of his philosophy at work? Why?

- showing movie clips during sermons
- forming new denominations
- offering programs to help people with addictions
- designing church buildings without steeples
- creating church Web sites
- protesting the practice of human trafficking

## Letter 26: Official, Legal, and Nominal Unselfishness

When you hear that even unselfishness can be used as leverage in temptation, what’s your reaction?

- “That’s it—I give up.”
- “C.S. Lewis really understood human nature.”
- “I need to be careful not to fake real charity.”
- “This is getting too complicated.”
- other \_\_\_\_\_

How could you avoid playing into Screwtape’s hands in the following situations?

- There’s only one piece of cake left, and three family members (including you) would like it.
- You loaned your neighbor a chain saw a month ago; it broke while in his possession, but you said nothing.
- You volunteered 40 hours to remove gang graffiti from park buildings, and nobody thanked you.
- Your spouse always gives you a magazine subscription for your birthday; you dutifully express gratitude, but think his or her choice is lazy and impersonal.

## Letter 27: Tips on Twisting Prayer

Which of the following questions about prayer have you found yourself asking?

- If God's going to do what He wants, why pray?
- Why am I so distracted when I pray?
- Why doesn't God seem to answer my prayers?
- Doesn't God have bigger things to worry about than my prayers?
- How do I know that what I prayed for wouldn't have happened anyway?
- other \_\_\_\_\_

Does the fact that the devil might exploit questions like these mean you shouldn't ask them? Why or why not?

Look at the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:9-13. What phrases in this prayer, if sincerely prayed, might bother Screwtape the most? Why?



## Letter 28: Real Worldliness: A Work of Time

What would Screwtape like to accomplish in the life of Wormwood's patient before the patient dies? What will happen if Wormwood fails? Why would the devil care whether a Christian "finishes well"?

Which do you think makes more fertile ground for temptation: adversity or prosperity? Why? How might biblical characters Job, Ananias, and Sapphira (see the Book of Job and Acts 5:1-11) answer that question? Which of their temptations might be easier for you to resist?

## Letter 29:

### The Benefits and Dangers of Cowardice

How does this letter illustrate the limits of the devil's power? Can he create real pleasure or virtue? Can he see into the future? Is he an equal to the "Enemy"? When you consider these limits, how do you feel?

Have you ever made a choice that now seems more cowardly than courageous? Did it seem that way at the time? Did the experience lead to spiritual growth, guilt, or something else? If you could make the choice again, how might you do things differently?

## Letter 30:

### Fatigue, and the Meaning of the Word "Real"

What would you probably do in the following situations if you'd had a good night's sleep and your schedule were clear? What if it were the end of an exhausting day and you were hoping to go to bed as soon as possible? How might Screwtape make the most of your fatigue and expectations?

- Your kids carelessly let the cat out the door, and you have to go find it in the rain.
- You get a call saying that your brother, who lives 1,000 miles away, has been in a car accident.
- Your spouse announces that he or she wants to talk about the problems in your relationship.

In each of the following pairs, which item is more "real"? Why would Screwtape want to convince you that one is more real than the other?

- kidney dialysis or a beautiful sunset
- your daughter's wedding or her divorce
- a birthday party or a funeral





