

Grace of Christ Yakima

Leader Study Guide: Community Life

Part 1: The Screwtape Letters, C.S. Lewis¹

The Fifth Week in our Fall 2021 10-week Grace of Christ Church-wide Community Life Series (*started September 12 and continues through the week of November 14*)

Please use only what you find helpful in this guide.

Week 5 (The Screwtape Letters: Chapter 9)

Get to Know You Questions

1. If you had a three-day weekend to do whatever you wanted to do ... no chores, nothing to fix, no obligations or commitments you had to attend to, and a \$1000 to spend, what would you do?
2. What was the last really good, really enjoyable, book you read (the kind of book you did not want to put down)?

Overview of the Study (We will be studying select chapters in the book)

Week 1: Prefaces and Chapter 1

Week 6: Chapters 10, 11, and 12

Week 2: Chapters 2, 3, and 4

Week 7: Chapter 13 and 14

Week 3: Chapters 5, 6, and 7

Week 8: Chapter 15

Week 4: Chapter 8

Week 9: Chapter 16

Week 5: Chapter 9

Week 10: Chapters 17, 18, and 19

Tips to reading The Screwtape Letters:

1. Each chapter was written as if it were a letter from a senior tempter instructing a junior tempter on how to ruin a person's (Christian) life.
2. Remember as you read that it was intentionally written from a diabolical point of view²
3. The devil and his followers are master liars. Keep that in mind as you read this book.
4. Each letter reveals how our enemy, the Devil, hopes to render us ineffective in our Christian life, and ultimately to ruin/destroy us.

Read this chapter out loud as a group

Questions from Chapter IX (9)

1. Screwtape suggests, "*the trough periods of the human undulation provide excellent opportunity for all sensual temptations, particularly those of sex ... the attack has a much better chance of success when a man's whole inner world is drab and cold and empty.*"

¹ C.S. Lewis, The Screwtape Letters, 1982 Edition, Touchstone book: Simon & Schuster, New York.

² On writing The Screwtape Letters, 'Though I had never written more easily, I never wrote with less enjoyment ... though it was easy to twist one's mind into the diabolical attitude, it was not fun, or not for long. The strain produced a sort of spiritual cramp. The work into which I had projected myself while I spoke through Screwtape was all dust, grit, thirst, and itch. Every trace of beauty, freshness, and geniality had to be excluded. It almost smothered me before I was done. It would have smothered my readers if I had prolonged it.'

- Do you agree with Screwtape? Do times of spiritual dryness, times when we are at a low point mentally, physically, socially, spiritually, increase our vulnerability to temptations of the physical type? (not only sexual temptations but also temptations to over-indulge with food, with drink, with binge watching TV, over shopping, over sleeping ...)
 - If you agree, why do you think we are more vulnerable at such times?
 - If you disagree, when is a person more vulnerable to sins of the physical type, and why?
- Screwtape also suggests that sexual temptations during the trough periods tend to be different than temptations of that type during peak times. In trough times humans are much more "*easily drawn into perversions*."
 - Why might this be true for some (or most) during low periods in their life? He makes the same case regarding temptations to over-drink in low times as compared to drinking during peak times.
- What can a person do to protect themselves for an increased vulnerability to temptations of the physical type? How do you protect yourself?

- **1 Corinthians 10**

"¹² Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. ¹³ No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it."

- **1 Corinthians 6**

"¹⁸ Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. ¹⁹ Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, ²⁰ for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body."

2. Screwtape states, "*never forget that when we are dealing with any pleasure in its healthy and normal and satisfying form, we are, in a sense, on the enemy's ground ... it is His invention, not ours. He made the pleasures: all our research so far has not enabled us to produce one. All we can do is to encourage the humans to take the pleasures which our Enemy has produced, at times, or in ways, or in degrees, which He has forbidden.*"

- Do you agree that God is the author of ALL good pleasures? As a group list all the things you can think of that are pleasurable (a good meal, friendship, humor, sex, competition, material things ...). Are those pleasures good things? Are there any real pleasures that are bad all through (they are not the result of a misuse of something good)? Discuss
- Do you agree that the only possibility the evil one has is to get us to take one of the good pleasures God has given us and get us to twist, distort, misuse that God given pleasure? Discuss
- **James 1**

"¹⁶ Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. ¹⁷ Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change."

3. Do you believe God intends for us to enjoy life?

- What has God created and placed in our life that has the potential of bringing us joy?

- Could it be that the bad things we experience are the direct result of a misuse of God's good gifts/pleasures?
 - What is the root cause of hunger and starvation? Can the world produce enough food to feed everyone adequately? If yes, why are there those who go hungry?
 - What is the root cause of war and terrorism? Are they the result of someone (or some group's) desire to have what someone else has?
 - What is the root cause of oppression of others, bullying and belittling others?
4. Screwtape states, *"An ever increasing craving for an ever diminishing pleasure is the formula ...to get the man's soul and give him nothing in return - that is what really gladdens Our Father's heart."*
- Can you think of examples of this (where a person pursues what they think will give them pleasure but the more they pursue it the less pleasure they experience)?
 - To put increasingly more effort into pursuing something that no longer gives you anything in return is my (Curt's) definition of "slavery." Do you agree/disagree with this definition of slavery? Explain
 - **Romans 6**

¹⁶ Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? ¹⁷ But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, ¹⁸ and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. ¹⁹ I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.

²⁰ For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. ²¹ But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. ²² But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. ²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."
5. Screwtape states, *"Do not let him suspect the law of undulation. Let him assume that the first ardours of his conversion might have been expected to last, and ought to have lasted, forever, and that his present dryness is an equally permanent condition ... you have only got to keep him out of the way of experienced Christians (an easy task nowadays) ..."*
- If a person is led to believe that the genuineness of their relationship with God depends on always feeling close to God, experiencing a continual spiritual high, having easy victories over temptation, sensing the same excitement that was evident when they first believed in Jesus, what problems might a period of dryness cause them and their faith in God?
 - How are we to understand times of dryness in our spiritual life? (times when praying is harder, we do not feel close to God, we give in to temptations ...)
 - Do times of dryness provide opportunities for spiritual growth leading to greater Christian maturity? Talk together about the positives that can come during and following a season of dryness.
 - Can you think of individuals in the Bible who went through difficult times, dry seasons?

- Consider:
 - Abraham waiting 25 years for God's promise to become a reality
 - Joseph a slave in Egypt locked away in prison for years
 - Elijah depressed, feeling like he was the only one left who loved God
 - Moses on the border of the promised land but not allowed to lead the people in
 - Peter after denying Jesus 3x

- **Romans 5**

"¹ Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ² Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. ³ Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵ and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us."

6. Screwtape advises, *"In a week or two you will be making him doubt whether the first days of his Christianity were not, perhaps, a little excessive. Talk to him about 'moderation in all things.' If you can once get him to the point of thinking that 'religion is all very well up to a point,' you can feel quite happy about his soul. A moderated religion is as good for us as no religion at all - and more amusing."*

- What are the dangers of a moderated faith in Jesus?
- Can a person be a casual, moderate Christian? Discuss

- **Matthew 16**

"²⁴ Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ²⁵ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. ²⁶ For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?"

- **Revelation 3**

"¹⁵ I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! ¹⁶ So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. ¹⁷ For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked."

If you have any questions or comments, if you need help with this study, with members of your group, or with technology, please call (248-7940 x114) or email (curt@yakimagrace.com)