The Life of C.S. Lewis

A Timeline of His Journey

The Early Years: A Belfast Boy (1898-1916)

- **1898:** Clive Staples Lewis, known as "Jack," is born in Belfast, Ireland.
- **1908:** His mother, Flora, dies of cancer. This profound loss deeply impacts his childhood and faith.
- **1911:** While at a prep school in Malvern, he declares himself an atheist.
- **1914:** Begins private study with W.T. Kirkpatrick ("The Great Knock"), who sharpens his skills in logic and reason.
- **1916:** First reads George MacDonald's *Phantastes*, an event he later said "baptized his imagination" with a sense of the holy.

From Scholar to Soldier: War & Oxford (1917-1929)

- **1917:** Enlists in the British Army during WWI. He is sent to the front lines in France on his 19th birthday.
- **1918:** Wounded in the Battle of Arras. His close friend, Paddy Moore, is killed.
- **1919:** Discharged from the army, he resumes his studies at Oxford, earning three Firsts (top honors) in Classics, Philosophy, and English.
- **1925:** Elected a Fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford, where he tutors in English Language and Literature for 29 years.
- **1926:** Meets a fellow scholar who would change his life: J.R.R. Tolkien.

✝ The Great Turn: Finding Faith (1929-1933)

After years of intellectual resistance, Lewis's journey back to faith was a slow, deliberate process, heavily influenced by his friends and readings.

- **1929:** Reluctantly becomes a theist, admitting "that God was God, and knelt and prayed." His father, Albert, dies the same year.
- **1931:** After a long, late-night conversation with J.R.R. Tolkien and Hugo Dyson about myth and Christianity, Lewis converts to Christianity while on a trip to the zoo with his brother, Warnie.
- **1933:** His literary group, "The Inklings," begins its famous meetings. Members include Tolkien, Warnie Lewis, and others, who would read and critique each other's work.

📖 The Author Emerges: Masterworks (1936-1954)

With his faith solidified, Lewis entered his most prolific period, producing enduring works of both fiction and Christian apologetics.

Key Publications

1938: *Out of the Silent Planet*
1941: *The Screwtape Letters* (first serialized)
1941-44: Gives his famous BBC radio talks that would become *Mere Christianity*.
1943: *The Abolition of Man*
1945: *The Great Divorce* (first serialized)
1950: *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (first Narnia book)
1952: *Mere Christianity* (published as a single volume)
1955: *Surprised by Joy* (autobiography)

♥ A Late Chapter of Love: Surprised by Joy (1952-1960)

In his later years, the confirmed bachelor's life was turned upside down by an unlikely romance that brought both profound happiness and deep sorrow.

- **1952:** Meets Joy Davidman Gresham, a sharp-witted American writer and fellow convert.
- **1956:** Enters into a civil marriage with Joy to grant her British citizenship. Later that year, after she is diagnosed with terminal cancer, they are married at her hospital bedside in a Christian ceremony.
- **1958:** Joy experiences a miraculous, though temporary, recovery from her cancer.
- **1960:** Joy dies of cancer. Lewis is devastated and later writes of his grief in *A Grief Observed*, published under a pseudonym.

The Final Journey: Beyond the Shadowlands (1963)

After a period of declining health, Lewis's life came to a quiet end.

> **November 22, 1963:** C.S. Lewis dies at his home, "The Kilns," one week before his 65th birthday. His death is largely overshadowed by the assassination of President John F. Kennedy on the same day. He is buried at Holy Trinity Church in Oxford.

The Fellowship of His Life

Warren "Warnie" Lewis: His older brother and closest friend. An officer, historian, and original Inkling.

J.R.R. Tolkien: Fellow Oxford professor and author of *The Lord of the Rings*. A devout Catholic whose friendship was instrumental in Lewis's conversion.

Joy Davidman Gresham: An American writer who became Lewis's wife. Their love story was the basis for the play and film *Shadowlands*.

The Inklings: An informal literary group of Oxford friends who met to read and discuss their work, including *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Chronicles of Narnia*.

W.T. Kirkpatrick ("The Great Knock"): His formidable tutor who taught him rigorous logic and clear thinking.

George MacDonald: A 19th-century Scottish author whose fantasy writings "baptized" Lewis's imagination long before his conversion.

Janie King Moore (Mrs. Moore): The mother of his army friend Paddy Moore. Lewis lived with and cared for her for over 30 years.