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Reflections

October 2018 – *TURNING OUR ATTENTION OUTWARD*

Have you ever thought about what humility looks like? This is one of the topics C.S. Lewis explored in *The Screwtape Letters*. In this book, Lewis is writing from the devil's perspective – showing us his temptation playbook. In one letter, senior devil Screwtape writes to his nephew Wormwood:

Your patient has become humble; have you drawn his attention to the fact? All virtues are less formidable to us once the man is aware that he has them, but this is specially true of humility. Catch him at the moment when he is really poor in spirit and smuggle into his mind the gratifying reflection, 'By jove! I'm being humble', and almost immediately pride — pride at his own humility — will appear. If he awakes to the danger and tries to smother this new form of pride, make him proud of his attempt — and so on, through as many stages as you please...

But there are other profitable ways of fixing his attention on the virtue of Humility. By this virtue, as by all the others, our Enemy wants to turn the man's attention away from self to Him, and to the man's neighbours. All the abjection and self-hatred are designed, in the long run, solely for this end; unless they attain this end they do us little harm; and they may even do us good if they keep the man concerned with himself, and, above all, if self-contempt can be made the starting point for contempt of other selves, and thus for gloom, cynicism, and cruelty.



You must therefore conceal from the patient the true end of Humility. Let him think of it not as self-forgetfulness but as a certain kind of opinion (namely, a low opinion) of his own talents and character... By this method thousands of humans have been brought to think that humility means pretty women trying to believe that they are ugly and clever men trying to believe they are fools... To anticipate the Enemy's strategy, we must consider His aims. The Enemy wants ... each man, in the long run, to be able to recognise all creatures (even himself) as glorious and excellent things. He wants to kill their animal self-love as soon as possible; but it is His long-term policy, I fear, to restore to them a new kind of self-love — a charity and gratitude for all selves, including their own; when they have really learned to love their neighbours as themselves, they will be allowed to love themselves as their neighbours...

His whole effort, therefore will be to get the man's mind off the subject of his own value altogether... The Enemy will also try to render real in the patient's mind a doctrine which they all profess but find it difficult to bring home to their feelings — the doctrine that they did not create themselves, that their talents were given them, and that they might as well be proud of the colour of their hair. But always and by all methods the Enemy's aim will be to get the patient's mind off such questions, and yours will be to fix it on them. Even of his sins the Enemy does not want him to think too much: once they are repented, the sooner the man turns his attention outward, the better the Enemy is pleased.¹

As we think about our own lives, let us ask God to help us turn our attention away from ourselves, to Jesus and to our neighbors.

*"Therefore, holy brothers and sisters, who share in the heavenly calling,
fix your thoughts on Jesus, whom we acknowledge as our apostle and high priest."*

HEBREWS 3:1 (NIV)

¹ C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, HarperSanFrancisco, 2001, pp. 69-73.