

November 2007—*Danger During Spiritual Dry Spells*

Have you ever been through a period of spiritual dryness? Spiritual dry spells are a common experience for those who are following Jesus Christ. They are also times of special spiritual danger.

C.S. Lewis describes one of those dangers through the mouth of Screwtape, a senior demon who is instructing his nephew, Wormwood, in the art of destroying souls.

I hope my last letter has convinced you that the trough of dullness or “dryness” through which your patient is going at present will not, of itself, give you his soul, but needs to be properly exploited. What forms the exploitation should take I will now consider.

In the first place I have always found that the trough periods of the human undulation provide excellent opportunity for all sensual temptations, particularly those of sex. This may surprise you, because, of course, there is more physical energy, and therefore more potential appetite, at the peak periods; but you must remember that the powers of resistance are then also at their highest. The health and spirits which you want to use in producing lust can also, alas, be very easily used for work or play or thought or innocuous merriment. The attack has a much better chance of success when the man’s whole inner world is drab and cold and empty. And it is also to be noted that the trough sexuality is subtly different in quality from that of the peak—much less likely to lead to the milk and water phenomenon which the humans call “being in love,” much more easily drawn into perversions, much less contaminated by those generous and imaginative and even spiritual concomitants which often render human sexuality so disappointing. It is the same with other desires of the flesh. You are much more likely to make your man a sound drunkard by pressing drink on him as an anodyne when he is dull and weary than by encouraging him to use it as a means of merriment among his friends when he is happy and expansive. 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. I know we have won many a soul through pleasure. All the same, 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. Hence we always try to work away from the natural condition of any pleasure to that in which it is least natural, least redolent of its Maker, and in which it is least pleasurable. An ever increasing craving for an ever diminishing pleasure is the formula. It is more certain; and it’s better *style*. To get the man’s soul and give him *nothing* in return—that is what really gladdens Our Father’s heart. And the troughs are the time for beginning the process.¹

In today’s sex-saturated world, believers who lead over-busy, stressed-out lives are prime candidates for abusing the legitimate pleasures God has given us, whether sex, drink, or something else. How easy it is to become ensnared in an ever-increasing craving for an ever-diminishing pleasure. And all the more so when one is also in a spiritual dry spell, with its inner drabness and coldness. In such times it is especially important to connect with two or three fellow believers who are spiritually strong and can provide encouragement and accountability until the dry time passes—as it inevitably will.

Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

1 PETER 5:8 (ESV)

¹ C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (New Jersey: Revell, 1976), pp. 53-54.