

# Reflections

DECEMBER 2019

## The Present Time

In a sermon C.S. Lewis preached in Oxford near the beginning of World War II, he addressed some of the challenges students faced during that extraordinary time. The sermon was later published under the title “Learning in War-Time.” Among other things, Lewis urged students to “not let your nerves and emotions lead you into thinking your predicament more abnormal than it really is.” He then mentioned “the three mental exercises which may serve as defences against the three enemies which war raises up against the scholar.” An excerpt, addressing the first two of these enemies,<sup>1</sup> follows:

The first enemy is excitement — the tendency to think and feel about the war when we had intended to think about our work. The best defence is a recognition that in this, as in everything else, the war has not really raised up a new enemy but only aggravated an old one. There are always plenty of rivals to our

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work. We are always falling in love or quarrelling, looking for jobs or fearing to lose them, getting ill and recovering, following public affairs. If we let ourselves, we shall always be waiting for some distraction or other to end before we can really get down to our work. The only people who achieve much are those who want knowledge so badly that they seek it while the conditions are still unfavourable. Favourable conditions never come. There are, of course, moments when the pressure of the excitement is so great that only superhuman self-control could resist it. They come both in war and peace. We must do the best we can.



The second enemy is frustration — the feeling that we shall not have time to finish. If I say to you that no one has time to finish, that the longest human life leaves a man, in any branch of learning, a beginner, I shall seem to you to be saying something quite academic and theoretical. You would be surprised if you knew how soon one begins to feel the shortness of the tether, of how many things, even in middle life, we have to say “No time for that,” “Too late now,” and “Not for me.” But Nature herself forbids you to share that experience. A more Christian attitude, which

can be attained at any age, is that of leaving futurity in God’s hands. We may as well, for God will certainly retain it whether we leave it to Him or not. Never, in peace or war, commit your virtue or your happiness to the future. Happy work is best done by the man who takes his long-term plans somewhat lightly and works from moment to moment “as to the Lord.” It is only our *daily* bread that we are encouraged to ask for. The present is the only time in which any duty can be done or any grace received.<sup>2</sup>

Do you allow the enemies of excitement and frustration to interfere with the work God has called you to do? Let us leave futurity in God’s hands and work from moment to moment “as to the Lord”.



*“Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward.*

*You are serving the Lord Christ.”*

COLOSSIANS 3:23-24 (ESV)

<sup>1</sup> For a passage covering the third enemy, “fear”, see *Reflections*, January 2019, *We Must Come to Terms With It*.

<sup>2</sup> C.S. Lewis, “Learning in War-Time”, *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1980), pp. 59-61.

