The C.S. Lewis Study Program

The Screwtape Letters

STUDY GUIDE

How to Use This Study Guide

No matter how new or familiar you are with The Screwtape Letters, this study guide and lecture series will be helpful. It is designed to open up the Letters for you, highlighting the central themes and underlying issues, leading to a clear grasp of C.S. Lewis's insights into how the forces of evil work against human beings.

Step One: Understanding

This study guide and the accompanying lectures are designed to be used in a complimentary fashion. While its brevity makes it easily read, The Screwtape Letters is not easily digested. Each person in the group should work through the study questions for each section of the Letters before viewing the corresponding lectures. In order to utilize the study questions, you will find it helpful to number the paragraphs in each letter as the study questions will make reference to them. You can download additional copies of this study guide at www.cslewisinstitute.org.

Step Two: Discussing The Screwtape Letters

Having gained a detailed understanding of The Screwtape Letters, the lectures will give you the bigger picture and provide background and emphasis to illuminate Lewis's thoughts. We trust that the lectures also will pull together insights that have not yet become clear to you.

When your group meets to discuss the book, view the appropriate lectures on DVD, each of which is approximately thirty-five minutes long. Then use the study questions you've previously worked through individually to facilitate discussion.

The Message of The Screwtape Letters

The Screwtape Letters is a very important book for our times. In our secularized and materialistic society, even Christians have little awareness of the spiritual side of reality.

By means of an imaginary correspondence between a senior tempter, Screwtape, and a junior devil, Wormwood, C.S. Lewis gives us penetrating insights into how the unseen powers of evil work to ensnare and destroy those who seek to follow Christ.

For Lewis, it is not so much that we must be delivered from demons that possess and control us; it is that we are constantly and quietly influenced by them. The demons are eager to corrupt and pollute, dissuading godly choices which cultivate faith and virtue. And Christians are not immune; indeed they are the primary target. In his famous sermon, "The Weight of Glory," Lewis noted that there are no ordinary people; we are all becoming either eternal wonders or eternal horrors. Similarly, the Letters show that there are no ordinary actions. It is a battle all the way from here to heaven.

Some have noted that reading the Letters is not a pleasant experience. Indeed, it is difficult to discover how tainted and corrupted we truly are. But such self-knowledge is essential to spiritual growth and maturity. The Lord's Prayer will take on new meaning and greater urgency, as we cry, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

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Study Questions for The Screwtape Letters

Letter 1

1. Screwtape affirms Wormwood for encouraging his patient's association with a "materialist" friend, ¶ 1. How would a preoccupation with the physical side of reality and ignorance of the spiritual be foundational for diabolical strategy?
2. How did Screwtape use what he called the "pressures of the ordinary," ¶ 3, and the familiar, ¶ 4, to "rescue" him from the influence of the Enemy?
3. In what ways do you think the pressures of the "ordinary" make you susceptible to diabolical influence?
4. What do you learn about the diabolical and the divine when it comes to the value of both argument, ¶ 2, and science, ¶ 4?
5. What did you learn about the nature of both divine and diabolical strategies that is new or surprising to you?

Letter 2

1. It appears that the church is the number-one tool for temptation. How do the tempters use hypocrisy and disappointment with other Christians as a snare, ¶ 2?
2. How might the church have been a snare for you?
3. What is it about the church that Screwtape does not want the patient to see, ¶ 2?
4. How does God use disappointment with the church for his own purposes, ¶ 3?
5. Screwtape celebrates how easy it is to highlight the hypocrisy of other Christians while encouraging Christians to ignore their own hypocrisies, ¶ 4. Consider what there is about your own conduct and character that you prefer to avoid or ignore?

Letter 3

1. Next to the church, the family is a choice tool for tripping up Christians. How can a false spirituality be a snare, ¶s 2 and 3?
2. Under the influence of the tempters, it seems that familiarity can indeed breed contempt. What does Screwtape encourage Wormwood to highlight, ¶s 4 and 5?
3. How does Screwtape's advice shed light on your own family interactions?
4. God works "from the center outward" to conform our conduct to his standard, ¶ 1. How have you seen your own conduct change under God's influence?
5. Even our "religious" behavior can be used to get under the skin of family members. Are there ways that your family members might struggle with your faith and Christian conduct?

Letter 4

1. According to Screwtape, the best way to keep a "patient" from praying is to cultivate a "devotional mood," ¶ 2. What is there about such a mood that Screwtape likes?
2. Next to a devotional mood, Screwtape recommends a focus on feelings, ¶ 3. What is there about feelings that Screwtape likes when seeking to twist prayer, ¶ 3?
3. Screwtape also likes imaginary pictures of God as a focus of prayer, ¶ 4. What is so diabolically attractive about praying to a mental image of God?
4. How can the advice of Screwtape to Wormwood help you to pray better?
5. What is there about Screwtape's fulminations that could be encouraging for your own prayer life, ¶ 4?

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Letter 5

1. WW II was raging in Europe during the correspondence between Screwtape and Wormwood, so it is not surprising that war is a subject of several of the letters. What is the surprising devilish attitude toward war, ¶s 1–3?
2. Screwtape says that Wormwood's primary business is to "undermine faith and prevent the formation of virtue" ¶ 1.What are some ways in which your faith has been diabolically assaulted and your development of virtue hindered?
3. In Screwtape's scenario, why do devils prefer death in a nursing home to death during war, ¶ 2?
4. How does the Enemy use war to his advantage, ¶ 2?
5. How might this letter change the way you view death?

Letter 6

1. Why would the devils want us to be preoccupied more with the future than the present, ¶s 1–3?
2. What insight do we gain from Screwtape's advice on how God helps us face our difficulties and challenges, ¶ 3?
3. What burdens and challenges are you carrying that could be helped by the godly "resignation" that Screwtape wants us to avoid, ¶s 2 and 3?
4. In what ways does Screwtape guide Wormwood in regard to the self-conscious and un-self-conscious attitudes of his patient, ¶ 4?
5. Why is it that the devils are much more interested in our actions toward others than in our attitudes, ¶ 6?

Letter 7

1. What advantages do devils gain by making their presence known, ¶ 1?
2. What advantages do devils gain by hiding their existence, ¶ 1?
3. At the time those letters were written, it was the policy of hell to keep demonic existence a secret. What do you think their policy would be at the present?
4. The themes touched on in this include causes, factions, and zeal, ¶s 2–5. Why is zeal to be encouraged, ¶ 2?
5. Why would Screwtape want to make Christianity a "means" and the world a "goal," ¶ 4?
6. Pacifism and patriotism were the chief opportunities for turning Christianity into a "means" at the time of WW II. What are some of the ways in which Christianity might be treated in the same way today?

Letter 8

1. According to Screwtape, we humans are "amphibians—half spirit and half animals, ¶ 1. What key does this provide for understanding human nature?
2. How might this insight into human nature be helpful for understanding your own life experiences and responses to God, ¶ 2?
3. God uses the lows of our spiritual experience as means to do deep work in our souls, ¶ 3. How have the lows in your own life been used to enhance your connection with God?
4. Screwtape says God "cannot ravish. He can only woo," ¶ 4. What do you think that means?
5. What fresh insights do you gain into the devilish and divine ways of working with and on humanity from Screwtape's instruction about human depression and difficulties?

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Letter 9

1. Screwtape continues his guidance to Wormwood on how to exploit "down" times, ¶ 1. How is it that sex and sensuality are especially powerful diabolical tools during times of darkness and depression, ¶s 2 and 3?

2. How do our temperaments affect the way the devils tempt us, ¶ 3?

3. One of the underlying themes of Screwtape's advice is that reality is shaped by truth, not by feelings. Why is it important to take all our phases and feelings with a grain of salt, ¶s 4 and 5?

4. Have you ever been tempted to give up your faith, either by denying or just ignoring it?

Letter 10

1. Clever, slightly sophisticated intellectuals especially fashionable during WW II were "just right" for diabolical use. How would they be a snare for Wormwood's patient, ¶s 1 and 2?

2. What social set would be just the right tool for a tempter to use on you?

3. The devils had devalued warnings about Worldly Vanities, the Choice of Friends, and the Value of Time by dismissively characterizing them as "Puritanism," ¶ 3. How has this strengthened the demonic while damaging growth in godliness?

4. How is it that the diabolical use of peer pressure can turn us into first-order hypocrites, ¶ 4?

5. How do you handle peer pressure that could be spiritually polluting?

Letter 11

1. Wormwood receives detailed instructions on laughter. What is there about joy and music that is so detestable to Screwtape, ¶ 2?

2. Screwtape doesn't much care for fun either, ¶ 3. How have you discovered fun to be an aid to spiritual growth?

3. Of the four types of humor, Screwtape prefers jokes and flippancy, ¶s 4–6. How is it that a joke can be a means of justifying bad behavior, ¶ 5?

4. What is flippancy, and how does Screwtape find it useful, ¶ 6?

5. How might the advice of Screwtape affect the way you "enjoy" parties and entertainments such as music, movies, and television?

Letter 12

1. Why is it valuable for Wormwood to encourage church attendance, despite its spiritual snares, ¶ 2?

2. How is it that Wormwood can combine spiritual degeneration and spiritual inclination into snares and roadblocks to spiritual growth, ¶ 3?

3. Wormwood learns how to keep his patient from prayers through just wasting time, ¶ 4. What sorts of things keep you from prayer?

4. On a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being low), how would you compare your current spiritual vitality with a year ago? What has encouraged your spiritual growth? What has hindered your spiritual growth?

Letter 13

1. Wormwood's patient did "wake up" from his spiritual drift and, for the time being, slipped through his fingers, ¶ 1. Try to identify ways in which pleasure can be a divine aid and a devilish snare, ¶ 3.

2. What is the difference between the detachment of self that God seeks and the detachment from reality that the devils seek, ¶s 3 and 4?

3. Why would Screwtape want to eradicate small pleasures, ¶ 3?

4. What fresh insight does Screwtape provide into the way that God works, ¶s 2 and 4?

5. What pleasures and pastimes do you find spiritually nourishing?

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Letter 14

1. According to Screwtape, virtues are less formidable to devils when they are known to the patient, ¶ 2. Why is this?
2. How do the devils twist humility so as to destroy it, ¶ 3?
3. What is the true nature of humility, ¶ 4?
4. What is God's goal for humility and all virtues, ¶s 4 and 5?
5. What are your virtues and outstanding talents? How well do you "handle" them?

Letter 15

1. Screwtape believes that the "Enemy" wants humanity to have a double vision, focusing on both time and eternity, ¶ 2. How is that double focus a benefit to us?
2. In contrast to a focus on both eternity and the present, Screwtape wants to obscure both from our sight. How does a preoccupation with the future do just that, ¶ 3?
3. Screwtape makes the enigmatic statement that "nearly all vices are rooted in the future." Explain what is wrong with "the future," ¶s 3 and 4?
4. What is it about the future that worries you?
5. In what ways can you discern concerns for the future that hinder your spiritual growth and hurt your heart?

Letter 16

1. Why does Screwtape want Wormwood's patient to become a church "connoisseur," ¶s 1 and 2?
2. One church near Wormwood's patient serves up a diluted Christianity. What does Screwtape especially like about it, ¶ 3?
3. Another church has a minister who is a passionate protestor against almost everything. What does Screwtape especially like about this one, ¶ 4?
4. Above all, Screwtape likes "party" churches in which members takes sides and are attached to causes, ¶ 5. What do you think Screwtape might like about your church?

Letter 17

1. We seldom think of gluttony as sin today; however, the devils do. What's the difference between the gluttony of Excess and the gluttony of Delicacy, ¶ 1?
2. Toward which type of gluttony are you inclined?
3. It is clear that Delicacy, as present in the patient's mother, is extremely irritating, ¶s 1 and 2. How does it shape her life and affect those around her?
4. Toward what expressions of gluttony are men inclined, ¶ 4?
5. The impact of gluttony is to make food a primary preoccupation which governs our lives. What role do you think food occupies in your life?

Letter 18

1. God has placed humanity in a dilemma concerning sex—either complete abstinence or unmitigated monogamy, ¶ 2. How do the devils seek to twist sex so that we don't live according to God's standards?
2. Why is God's creation of love offensive and irritating to Screwtape, ¶s 3 and 4?

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3. The devils not only twist sex but love as well. How have they twisted love to destroy God's intentions, ¶ 5?

4. What do we learn about God's true intention for sex and love from Screwtape's instructions to Wormwood?

5. How might the observations of Screwtape change the way you think about both sex and love?

Letter 19

1. Love is the fundamental difference between heaven and hell, ¶ 2. What does the conflict over love show about God and Satan?

2. Screwtape also reveals the basic demonic strategy, making use of anything and everything so that we are drawn away from God, ¶ 3. How do the devils twist love to their own purposes, ¶ 2?

3. How have you experienced love as being both a means of drawing you to God and also a means of being pulled away from God?

Letter 20

1. Temptations lose their power as God steps in, ¶ 1. Why do you think God even allows temptations at all?

2. How has the demonic strategy of twisting sexual desire varied through the ages, ¶ 3?

3. In what ways might the devils be twisting sexual desire for our time?

4. Screwtape writes about the terrestrial and infernal Venus as temptations for men, ¶ 4. What are they like, and how are they useful?

5. Although Screwtape doesn't mention them, how might a terrestrial and infernal Mars be tempting for woman?

Letter 21

1. Screwtape encourages Wormwood to attack his patient's peevishness—that is, getting easily irritated by unimportant and insignificant things, ¶ 1. What's devilish about being irritated by interruptions and intrusions on "our" time, ¶ 2?

2. How do you respond when events and people intrude on your own plans?

3. From a Christian perspective, what's wrong with a personal sense of ownership?

4. How would your attitude toward life be different if you cultivated a sense of time and possessions that would be more pleasing to God than to the devils?

Letter 22

1. What doesn't Screwtape like about the new love of Wormwood's patient, ¶ 2?

2. Why would Screwtape call God a hedonist (one who lives for pleasure), ¶ 3?

3. Screwtape clearly thinks that the holiness of the woman's family has an infectious stink, ¶ 4. How would you describe the woman's family?

4. While he is on a rant, Screwtape goes after both music and silence, ¶ 5. How have music and silence been a means of pleasure and grace to you?

Letter 23

1. The search for the historical Jesus that Screwtape refers to is an attempt to reinvent Jesus according to the scholastic fashion of each generation. What does Screwtape like about this, ¶ 3?

2. What do you think is the current "fashionable" teaching about Jesus in our generation?

3. One devilish agenda is to destroy devotional life. How do they do that, ¶ 3?

4. The fact of the Resurrection and the doctrine of the Redemption were the heart of the early Christian message, according to Screwtape. What do you think is the heart of the currently popular Christian message?

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5. Why would Screwtape be glad to have Christianity be a means for accomplishing a political agenda for the good of society, ¶ 5?

6. How are the devils of our time active in a diabolical mixture of faith and politics?

Letter 24

1. Evidently there is something about faith that is contagious; the patient's girlfriend has "caught' it from her family and friends, ¶ 1. How can Wormwood use this spiritual contagion principle to twist his patient's faith, ¶s 2 and 3?

2. Essential elements of twisting the patient's faith are pride and confusion. How can Wormwood use them, ¶s 3 and 4?

3. How is it that peer pressure can be both a positive and a negative for spiritual growth, ¶ 5?

4. How has the influence of others been a positive force in your spiritual development?

5. How might the influence of others be a negative force for your spiritual growth?

Letter 25

1. Screwtape does not like "mere" Christianity; he prefers to water down faith with fashionable issues and concerns, ¶ 1. What sort of fashionable issues are presently being added to Christianity?

2. How do Novelty and Fashion, devilish smoke and mirrors, affect us, ¶s 2–5?

3. What impact do Novelty and Fashion have on where you live, the cars you buy, and the clothes you wear?

4. The greatest triumph of the "demonic horror of the Same Old Thing" is in the realm of ideas. What's wrong with asking if an idea is relevant rather than asking if it is prudent or true, ¶ 6?

5. Now that you have read Screwtape's strategy, what would you say to a person who dismissed Christianity as "old fashioned"?

Letter 26

1. Screwtape wants Wormwood to sow seeds of confusion that will bear fruit, not immediately but in ten years' time, ¶ 1. What do you think about his statement that the word love is "ambiguous" ¶ 1?

2. Why does Screwtape celebrate the devilish substitution of "unselfishness" for charity (love), ¶ 2?

3. How does mistaking sexual excitement for charity, and thinking that this excitement will last, affect us, ¶ 3?

4. Describe how the devil's twist of unselfishness can sour a relationship, ¶ 4.

5. In what ways can you discern this devilish concept of unselfishness in your own thoughts and behavior?

Letter 27

1. What good advice for handling distractions in prayer can you apply from Screwtape's prayer, ¶ 1?

2. What specific and practical ways to pray can we discern from Screwtape's advice, ¶ 2?

3. What confusion and doubts about prayer does Wormwood's patient have that Wormwood will accentuate, ¶s 3 and 4?

4. What doubts and concerns may hinder your prayers?

Letter 28

1. Why does Screwtape prefer to see that Wormwood's patient lives through the War to middle age and beyond, ¶ 1?

2. In light of Screwtape's advice to Wormwood, consider: how has aging affected your spiritual passion and development?

3. Why would devils want us to believe that this world can be turned into heaven, ¶ 2?

4. From both the divine and diabolical perspectives, what is the value of a long life, ¶ 3?

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Letter 29

1. How do you think that the devils twist virtue to their advantage, ¶ 2?
2. What problems do the devils have in using cowardice to trip us up, ¶s 4, 5 and 7?
3. From Screwtape's reflection we learn that God has chosen to create a world of dangers in which moral choices truly matter, ¶ 6. Why would he do that?
4. What is it that truly matters to devils about the human experience of sin, ¶ 8?

Letter 30

1. The devils are interested in actions and results, not feelings, ¶ 1. How might this insight affect the way you think about your own growth in virtue?
2. From a demonic perspective, what are the "benefits of fatigue," and how do demons twist it against us, ¶s 2 and 3?
3. Wormwood learns about ways to use "reality" to raise doubts about his patient's faith. In what two contrasting ways have the devils twisted our thoughts of reality to their advantage, ¶ 4?
4. How does the devilish twisting of our understanding of reality hinder our growth in faith and the development of virtue?

Letter 31

1. Wormwood's patient completely escaped demonic harassment by dying. What is the first thing the patient sees on the other side of death, ¶ 2?
2. How does Screwtape help us to grasp what death really means and why death is even beneficial, ¶ 3?
3. According to Screwtape, what sort of insights do people have as they experience the process of dying, ¶ 3?
4. What do you think Screwtape means when he laments that the patient will see "Them" and "Him" ¶s 4 and 5?
5. How does the sight of Christ on the other side of death affect Wormwood's patient, ¶ 5?

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We have included this chart to aid in your understanding of both the divine and diabolical strategies at play in our lives.

CHAPTER THEMES	DIABOLICAL STRATEGIES	DIVINE STRATEGIES
1. Pre-Conversion	1. Jargon 2. Appetites	Science and Reason
2. Church	1. Unconverted habits 2. The Straw-man church 3. Straw-man Christians 4. Innate hypocrisy	Disappointment
3. Family	1. Introspection 2. Vacuous prayers 3. Irritating habits 4. Annoying communication 5. Religious Irritation	Process and Stages
4. Prayer	1. Devotional mood 2. Spiritual feelings 3. Childish Images	*
5. War	Long-term medical care	Responding to Desperation
6. War Continued	1. Worry for the future 2. Self-conscious/un-self-conscious 3. Imaginary Virtues	1. The Present 2. Active Virtues
7. Devils, Patriots and Pacifists	1. Spiritual ignorance 2. Christianity as means for a cause	Intervention
8. Dry and Desert Experiences	Opposing God's Intentions	The Law of Undulation
9. Life Phases	1. Troughs and Down Times 2. Twisted pleasure 3. Phases	Pleasure
10. Cliques	1. Snobbery 2. Peer Pressure	*
11. Humor	1. Humor as Consolation and Excuse 2. Humor as flippancy	Joy and fun
12. Sloth	1. Small sins 2. Spiritual drift	Intruding on our spiritual slumber
13. Pain and Pleasure	Eradication of strong personal taste.	1. Good books, country roads, real pain and pleasure 2. Godly detachment
14. Humility	1. Self consciousness 2. Distortion about the true nature of humility	*
15. Time and Eternity	1. Suppressing both eternal and the present 2. Worry about the future	Present and Eternity.

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CHAPTER THEMES	DIABOLICAL STRATEGIES	DIVINE STRATEGIES
16. Church Hopping	1. Liberal churches 2. Opinionated pastors 3. Party and cliques	Diversity and discernment
17. Gluttony	1. Delicacy 2. Male and female gluttony	Whisper
18. Sex	Romantic love	Abstinence or monogamy
19. Love	Twisted love	Love
20. Sex, Love and Marriage	1. Twisted sexual desires 2. Terrestrial/infernal Venus	Direct action
21. Pride and Peevishness	Conquest	Creation
22. Love	1. Women 2. Noise	1. Pleasure 2. Love 3. Music and silence
23. Jesus	1. Historical Jesus 2. Christianity as a means of social justice.	1. Great moralists 2. Resurrection and Redemption
24. Godly Influence	1. Convention 2. Spiritual Pride 3. Spiritual Confusion 4. The Inner Ring	Spiritual influence of others
25. Pleasure and the Same Old Thing	1. Christianity and . . . 2. Novelty and Fashion	Rhythm and "Platitudes"
26. Unselfishness	1. Twisting love 2. Twisting eros	Complimentarily
27. Prayer and Time	1. False spirituality 2. Historical Point of View	Prayer and distraction
28. The Corruption of Aging	1. Middle age 2. Attrition and Attachment 3. Idealization of Youth 4. "Experience is the mother of illusion"	Detachment
29. Twisted Virtues	1. Hatred 2. Cowardice	Virtue and the value of morality
30. Confusing what is false and real	Fatigue and weakness	*
31. Deliverance	*	Life beyond death

* Not every letter has readily apparent diabolical and divine strategies.