

Learning from the Spiritual Pilgrimage of C.S. Lewis

A video based program of the C.S. Lewis Institute
for Small Group and Individual Study



Study Guide for Learning from the Spiritual Pilgrimage of C.S. Lewis

A Six-Part Video Series
by Lyle Dorsett

Study Guide written by J. Edward Glancy, J.D.



Introduction: Lyle Dorsett, who has been the Billy Graham Professor of Evangelism at Beeson Divinity School since 2005, began studying the spiritual formation of C.S. Lewis because he wanted to understand how Lewis developed spiritually. From the time of his conversion he began to grow into the increasingly mature Christian who would have a positive impact on many people. Dorsett's research involved numerous trips to Britain over seven years, scores of formal oral history interviews with people who knew Lewis, and studying Lewis's books and many of his letters. As he worked on this topic, Dorsett found that his own spiritual disciplines and approach to growing in the faith were changed.

In this six-part video series, Dorsett shares what he learned about Lewis's spiritual formation, including what factors were involved in shaping him into a mature and influential Christian. He also calls us to consider what elements we can take ourselves and put into practice. The video series was recorded at the 2016 C.S. Lewis Institute Summer Conference held at the Marion E. Wade Center, Wheaton College.

This Study Guide is designed to facilitate and enhance use of the videos by small groups. It may also be used by individuals for personal study and reflection.

Needed Resources: In order to follow this Study Guide, you will need access to the Internet. An electronic version of the Study Guide is available on the C.S. Lewis Institute website, which includes links to the videos and other needed resources. There is no charge for the electronic Study Guide or other needed resources. You may find it helpful to also have a printed copy of the Study Guide.

Using this Study Guide for Small Groups: This Study Guide includes suggested outlines for six small group sessions, corresponding to the six videos. The following guidelines are included for each session:

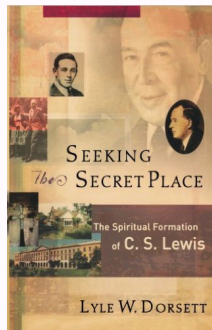
1. **Open in prayer**
2. **Watch video** You will need between 45 minutes and about an hour to watch the video, depending on the session. (Note that while the video for Session 6 is 75 minutes, the primary talk ends after about 55 minutes. A Q&A period follows which can be shortened or omitted if you wish to keep the video within a one-hour period.)
3. **Group Discussion** The Study Guide includes several questions for each session to facilitate group discussion.
4. **Read a Reflections** (1 page) *Reflections* is a one-page resource published by the C.S. Lewis Institute which provides a key message for daily living from the thought of C.S. Lewis. We suggest that one (or more) of the participants in the small group read the linked *Reflections* aloud.
5. **Close in prayer**



You can vary this schedule to account for the amount of available time, and may wish to include a time for fellowship and refreshment.

The Study Guide also includes **Personal Action Steps**, for participants to prayerfully consider on their own.

Highly Recommended Resource: While not required for this Study, we recommend as an additional resource Lyle Dorsett's book **Seeking the Secret Place: The Spiritual Formation of C.S. Lewis (or STSP)** (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2004). The book is relatively short (182 pp. including bibliography and index) and provides the same basic content as the videos, as well as additional material. It would be helpful to read the book along with the videos and/or to use it to review topics of special interest. The Study Guide includes references to the book in two ways. For some of the questions, relevant pages in the book are referenced in brackets. Also, one or more chapters of the book are cited as recommended reading for each session.



Seeking the Secret Place: The Spiritual Formation of C.S. Lewis

by Lyle Dorsett



Session One: Introduction and Part 1 of Prayer: “A Sustained and Regular Habit”

But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

— 2 Peter 3:18 (ESV)



1. Open in prayer



2. Watch Video (45 min.)

<https://youtu.be/NM1mQ0EUUnQ?list=PLmm0Q3Jw0IK-T8akKT5LE1drq7kLFsIFy3>



3. Questions for group discussion
(or individual reflection)

(1) As noted in the Introduction to this Study Guide, Professor Dorsett began studying the spiritual formation of C.S. Lewis because he wanted to understand how Lewis developed into an increasingly mature Christian who would have such a positive impact on many people. Based on the video, what were some of the disciplines and other factors that helped Lewis in his spiritual growth?

(2) As discussed by Dorsett, C.S. Lewis urged a new Christian to “be busy learning to pray.” What do you think about this advice? Do you view prayer as a discipline that needs to be learned through practice? Do you think this advice would also apply to more mature Christians? Wherever you are in your walk with the Lord, what are some specific steps you could take to more purposely “be busy learning to pray”? [STSP, pp. 29-30]

(3) Lewis observed that Christian teaching “seems at first sight to contain two different patterns of petitionary prayer which are inconsistent.” According to Lewis, one of the patterns (Jesus’s prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane) is “if it be possible ... nevertheless, not as I will but as Thou wilt,” and the other (Mark 11:24) is “Whatsoever you ask believing that you shall receive you shall obtain.” How did Lewis resolve this tension? How would you resolve it? [STSP, pp. 35-36]



4. Read *Reflections: “Jesus Christ”* (see page 19)



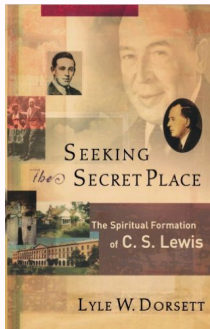
5. Close in prayer



Personal Action Steps

(1) Reflect about your current relationship with the Lord and your prayer life over the past two or three months. Pray about whether you would grow in your relationship with God by more purposely being busy learning to pray. If so, write down (a) a specific step you plan to take over the next two weeks to “be busy learning to pray” and (b) list the days during that two-week period you will take that action.

Recommended Readings



Article: Profiles in Faith: C.S. Lewis (1898-1963), by Lyle Dorsett
(4 pp.)

Chapter 1 of Dorsett’s book
Seeking the Secret Place: The Spiritual Formation of C. S. Lewis [STSP], Introduction: “God Grant Me to Say Things Helpful to Salvation” (12 pp.)



Session Two: Part 2 of Prayer: “A Sustained and Regular Habit”

And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests...



— *Ephesians 6:18 (NIV)*



1. Open in prayer

2. Watch Video (60 min.)



<https://youtu.be/dOTQnjM954U?list=PLmm0Q3Jw0IKT8ak-KT5LE1drq7kLFsIFy3>

3. Questions for group discussion (or individual reflection)

(1) C.S. Lewis, or “Jack,” lost his mother, at the age of nine. A few days before she died, and knowing her death was imminent, Mrs. Lewis prayed for her two sons (Jack and his brother Warren, or “Warnie”) and gave each of them a Bible which she signed. The Bible shown near the beginning of the video is the one Mrs. Lewis gave to Warnie. Have you ever been given a Bible, e.g., by a family member, a friend, or your church? Why do you think they gave you that Bible? Have you ever given a Bible to someone else?

(2) What were Lewis’s views on whether and how our lives and prayers influence God? What are your views? [STSP, pp. 39, 46]

(3) Do you sometimes “pray the Scriptures”? How do you do that, or how might you do that?

(4) How did Lewis’s understanding of praise change over the course of his life? Do you agree with Lewis’s statement that “we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation”? What steps could you take to enrich your praise life? [STSP, pp. 47-49]



4. Read a *Reflections*: “**Getting a Bigger View of Prayer**” (see page 20)

5. Close in prayer



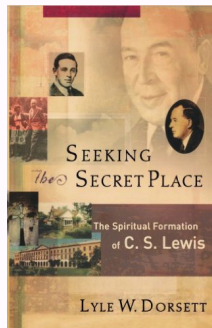
Personal Action Steps

(1) Dorsett observes that Lewis’s correspondence shows that he interceded faithfully for an unusually large number of people and also humbly sought prayer for himself. Make a list of people you might approach to pray for you, and identify one person you will call during the next week to discuss (or schedule a time to discuss) the best means to communicate your needs.

(2) Make plans to pray two Psalms during the next week. Identify the two Psalms and the days you will pray them.

(3) Dorsett notes that late in his life, Lewis observed that petitionary prayer is “both allowed and commanded to us: ‘Give us our daily bread,’ but also maintained that “prayer in the sense of petition, asking for things, is a small part of it, confession and penitence are its threshold, adoration its sanctuary, the presence and vision and enjoyment of God its bread and wine. In it God shows Himself to us.” What types of prayer would you like to add to your current prayer life? How would you accomplish that? Write down a specific step you will take during the next week to enrich your regular prayer life in this area.

Recommended Reading:



Chapter 2 of STSP, **Prayer:**
“Sustained and Regular Habit”
(21 pp.)



Session Three: Scripture: “Its Necessity for Spiritual Formation”

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

— 2 Timothy 3:16-17 (ESV)



1. Open in prayer



2. Watch Video (58 min.)

<https://youtu.be/WIS8QwbFt2o?list=PLmm0Q3Jw0IKT8akK-T5LE1drq7kLFsIFy3>



3. Questions for group discussion
(or individual reflection)

(1) Dorsett emphasizes that to Lewis, Scripture is the litmus test of the validity of all other sources of Divine guidance. For example, in a situation where a woman encountered clergymen who denied the truth of Mary’s virginity before the birth of Jesus, Lewis urged her not “to collect the opinions of individual clergymen, but ... read Mathew and Luke I and II.” What is your approach for resolving questions about Christian doctrine and how we should live our lives as followers of Christ? [STSP, pp. 52-53]

(2) Dorsett discusses an interview Lewis had six months before his death with Sherwood Wirt, editor of Decision magazine. In the interview, Lewis was asked “What is your view of the daily discipline of the Christian life—the need for taking time to be alone with God?” According to Dorsett, the context of the question was a debate at the time about whether an emphasis on spending daily time in Scripture and in prayer placed a “yoke of legalism” on people. Lewis responded to Wirt’s question:

We have our New Testament regimental orders upon the subject. I would take it for granted that everyone who becomes a Christian would undertake this practice. It is enjoined upon us by Our Lord; and since they are His commands, I believe in following them. It is always possible that Jesus Christ meant what He said when He told us to seek the secret place and close the door.



Do you agree with Lewis that daily routine of prayer and Scripture reading is not a yoke of legalism but simply obedience to Jesus? [STSP, pp. 65-66]

(3) What steps might a Christian take to establish or improve a daily discipline in these areas? Have you found any particular resources helpful to you in maintaining this discipline, e.g., a Bible reading plan such as the one incorporated in *The One Year Bible* or a daily devotional such as Scripture Union's *Encounter With God*?



4. Read a Reflections: “Engaging the Process”

(see page 21)

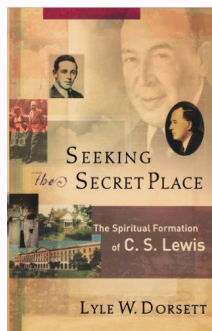


5. Close in prayer

Personal Action Steps

(1) How would you like to strengthen your discipline of reading and meditating on Scripture? If you do not currently have a daily routine of prayer and Scripture reading, write down the actions you will take to begin this routine. (If you're not sure where to start, an excellent resource is *Scripture Union's Encounter With God, A Guide for Meeting God Daily in His Word*. This resource takes the reader through the Old Testament once and the New Testament twice in five years, reading 10-20 verses per day. You can read it on the web or have it sent to you by daily e-mail for free, or purchase a printed version from Scripture Union. The web address for this resource can be found [here](#).

Recommended Reading:



Chapter 3 of Dorsett's book STSP,
**Scripture: “Our Lord's Teaching
Allows No Quarter”**
(17 pp.)



Session Four: The Church and the Necessity of Spiritual Formation in Community

For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.

—*Romans 12:4-5 (ESV)*



1. Open in prayer



2. Watch Video (58 min.)

<https://youtu.be/jEkKqWkVlqA?list=PLmm0Q3Jw0IKT8akK-T5LE1drq7kLFsIFy3>



3. Questions for Group Discussion
(or individual reflection)

(1) Lewis described the “mere” Christianity he presented as being “like a hall of which doors open into special rooms,” with the rooms being the various Christian denominations/churches. Lewis stressed that while the goal of his book *Mere Christianity* was to bring people into the hall, once there they must choose one of the rooms to enter because “it is in the rooms, not in the hall, that there are fires and chairs and meals. The hall is a place to wait in, a place to try the various doors, not a place to live in.” What do you think of Lewis’s analogy of mere Christianity being like a hall with doors that open into special rooms?

(2) In his book *STSP*, Dorsett points out that while Lewis believed that many disagreements among Christians are over secondary issues rather than over essentials of the faith, he believed that many “modernists” are not among the company of “mere” Christians. Lewis maintained that some modernists lead people away from orthodoxy and therefore from Christ and the truth, because, among things, they refuse to embrace miracles and the supernatural. (*STSP*, p. 77) What factors should a Christian consider in selecting a specific church to join, and what role should the teaching of doctrinal truth have in the decision?

(3) While Lewis didn’t seek to tell other people what “room” or denomination they should select, he was an Anglican. As we study



his spiritual formation, we see him taking advantage of the spiritual resources that were available to him in his church and community, including, for example attending a parish church near his home and going to daily chapel at Oxford. What spiritual resources are available to you in your church and community? Which ones are you taking advantage of?

(4) How do different people in your church complement each other? What are some of the contributions you make, or have made in the past, to your local church?



4. Read a *Reflections*: “Finding a Good Church”

(see page 22)



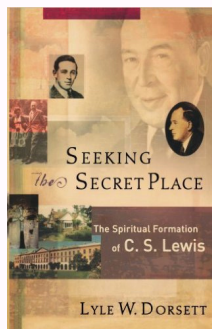
5. Close in prayer

Personal Action Steps

(1) As you think about the gifts and talents God has given you, what are some things you might do to contribute to your church or to other Christian ministries that you are not currently doing? Write down one thing that you would like to do, and when you will likely be able to do it.

(2) Take some time to identify spiritual resources that are available to you in your church and community. As necessary, ask Christian friends, call your church, and use the internet to help you. Which of these resources would be beneficial for you in your spiritual development?

Recommended Reading:



Chapter 4 of Dorsett’s book STSP, *The Church: “The New Testament Knows Nothing of Solitary Religion”* (16 pp.)



Session Five—Spiritual Friends and Guidance

The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice.



—Proverbs 12:15 (ESV)



1. Open in prayer

2. Watch Video (62 min.)



<https://youtu.be/nx-JJ2UA21Q?list=PLmm0Q3Jw0IKT8akK-T5LE1drq7kLFsIFy3>

3. Questions for Group Discussion
(or individual reflection)

(1) What are some of the ways in which C.S. Lewis was influenced by other Christians?

(2) How have you been influenced by other Christians? Are there particular Christian authors who have influenced you?

(3) Have you experienced being part of a small prayer group? If so, what was the nature of the group, and do you think it was helpful to you/other members in walking with the Lord?

(4) Have you had a Christian mentor?



(5) In what ways do you influence other people? How would you like to influence other people?



4. Read a *Reflections*: “Longing for Home”

(see page 23)

5. Close in prayer

Personal Action Steps

(1) Do you have a spiritual mentor, e.g., a pastor, elder or mature believer, who you periodically meet with and consult for counsel? Are you part of a small prayer group? If not, what steps might you take to find a spiritual mentor and/or become part of a small prayer group? Pray about whether this is something that would help you in

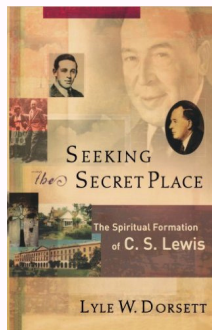


your walk with the Lord. If you're interested in this but not sure how to proceed, ask your pastor about it.

(2) Identify two books by Christian authors that you believe would be beneficial for you to read in the next couple of months. Some suggested authors to consider are A.W. Tozer, Oswald Chambers, C.S. Lewis, Jerry Bridges, Philip Yancey, and Tim Keller. Write down how you will obtain the books and when you plan to read them.

(3) Reflect on how you influence other people. Pray that God would show you specific opportunities to have a positive impact on the spiritual growth of other people. Are you a spiritual mentor to one or more people? If not, have you prayed about whether that is something God would have you pursue?

Recommended Reading:



Chapter 5 of Dorsett's book **STSP, Spiritual Friends and Guidance: "A Wonderful Opportunity"** (23 pp.)



Session Six: A Reluctant Guide: Final Lessons from the Life of C.S. Lewis

...If you love me, you will keep my commandments.
—John 14:15 (ESV)



1. Open in prayer



2. Watch Video (75 min.)

https://youtu.be/i8GpBm_qNFU?list=PLmm0Q3Jw0IKT8ak-KT5LE1drq7kLFsIFy3



3. Questions for group discussion (or individual reflection)

(1) Why does Dorsett refer to Lewis as a “reluctant guide” [STSP], pp. 109-118]

(2) Just before the confirmation and first communion of his god-daughter Sarah, Lewis gave her some advice:

... don't expect ... you will have all the feelings you would like to have. You may, of course: but also you may not. But don't worry if you don't get them. They aren't what matter. The things that are happening to you are quite real things whether you feel as you would wish or not ...

In a letter to a lady who was a recent convert to Christianity, Lewis gave similar advice:

It is quite right that you should feel that “something terrific” has happened to you...Accept these sensations with thankfulness as birthday cards from God, but remember that they are only greetings, not the real gift. I mean that it is not the sensations that are the real thing. The real thing is the gift of the Holy Spirit which can't usually be — perhaps not ever — experienced as a sensation or emotion. The sensations are merely the response of your nervous system. Don't depend on them. Otherwise when they go and you are once more emotionally flat (as you certainly will be quite soon), you might think that the real thing had gone too. But it won't. It will be there when you can't feel it. May even be most operative when you can feel it least.

What do you think about Lewis's advice for Christians not to depend on their feelings? Since most people do have ups and downs in their feelings, what steps can you take to remember, especially in



“down times”, that our faith is not dependent on our feelings, but on the trustworthiness of God and Holy Scripture?

(3) Toward the end of the video, Dorsett shared what he has found to be the most important spiritual food and exercises for the healthy and growing soul, some of which he learned from Lewis and some from other people:

Daily Bible reading and study of Scripture;
A balanced life of prayer;
Radical obedience to God’s commands;
Participation in the life of a healthy church

What are your thoughts on this list? Are there any items you would add? Are there any changes that you have made in your life, or would like to make, in these or other areas as a result of this study?

(4) In discussing the importance of a balanced life of prayer, Dorsett recommended the ACTS model: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication. Have you used this model? Do you think it is or would be helpful in having a balanced prayer life?

(5) While emphasizing the importance of confession, Dorsett stated that confession without repentance is a bad thing. He stated that anybody will confess, especially if they get caught. What is the difference between confession and repentance?



4. Read a *Reflections*: “Trust and Obey” (see page 24)

5. Close in prayer

Personal Action Steps

(1) Make plans to pray specifically using the ACTS model two days each week for the next four weeks. Write down the days you will do this. Pray about how God might want you to incorporate this model into your daily prayer life.

Note: You may wish to consider reading the following two short resources concerning the ACTS model:



How does one pray? I’ve never been taught how to say a personal prayer or really talk to God, from the [Billy Graham Evangelistic Association](#).



A Simple Acrostic for Prayer: A.C.T.S., from R.C. Sproul, [Ligonier Ministries.org](#).



(2) In the first video, Dorsett quoted Frederick B. Meyer as observing that “the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ is present in all true Christians. He is prominent in some, and He is pre-eminent, alas, in only a few.” Dorsett believes the Spirit of Christ became preeminent in C.S. Lewis, which helps explain the impact Lewis had on so many people. How about you? Ask God to show you whether the Spirit of Christ is present, prominent, preeminent in you, and what steps you can take, in cooperation with God, to grow in Christ. After prayerfully reflecting on this, write down at least two steps that you will take on an ongoing basis, beginning now.

Consider: The most important question in life for anyone is whether they are a Christian, i.e., have you accepted what Jesus Christ has done on your behalf through His death on the cross and His resurrection and asked Him to be your Lord and Savior? If you’re not sure about this, we urge you to consider the following resources:

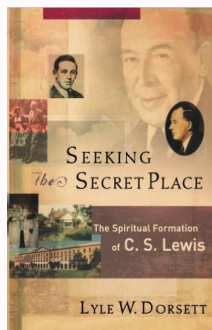


Begin Your Journey To Peace, from the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association.
PeaceWithGod.net.



The Bridge to Life, by **The Navigators**.

Recommended Readings:



Chapter 6 of Dorsett’s book STSP, **Reluctant Guide: “I Wanted Them to Follow Christ”** (22 pp.)

Chapter 7 of Dorsett’s book STSP, **Steering Through Troubled Waters: “Keep Your Eye on the Helmsman”** (29 pp.)

Chapter 8 of Dorsett’s book STSP, **Legacy: “The Real Thing Will Live on after the Shine of My Books Dies”** (5 pp.)

Reflections

A one-page monthly reflection on a thought or idea from C.S. Lewis, applicable to one's personal life. For more information please go to www.cslewisinstitute.org/Reflections.