

# C.S. LEWIS INSTITUTE STUDY GUIDE

## The Screwtape Letters by C.S. Lewis A Spiritual Warfare Training Handbook

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## HOW TO USE THIS CSLI STUDY GUIDE

*The Screwtape Letters* study guide is designed for those new to the book as well as those who have read it multiple times. It highlights the central themes and underlying issues addressed by Lewis, leading to a deeper grasp of his insights into how the forces of evil work against human beings. It may be used both for personal study and for use in a small group in a church, neighborhood, or campus ministry.

The first edition of the CSLI's Study Guide to *The Screwtape Letters* was prepared in 2010 by Stephen Eyre. Many of the questions and the overview chart that summarizes the themes, diabolical (devilish) strategies, and divine strategies described in the book were written by him.

With an opportunity in 2022 to celebrate the eightieth anniversary of the publishing of the book *The Screwtape Letters*, Joe Kohm and Joel Woodruff have expanded upon the earlier guide by adding a fuller introduction, appropriate Scripture citations, and some suggested “Divine Strategies” for practical application in one’s spiritual life in doing spiritual warfare, along with a plan for small group study.

An introductory article, “The Devil and Spiritual Warfare: Biblical Perspectives,” by Tom Tarrants, provides a biblical framework for the study of *The Screwtape Letters*. C.S. Lewis based his understanding of the devil and the battle for the souls of men, women, and children from the biblical texts summarized in the article.

### STEP 1: PERSONAL UNDERSTANDING

This study guide is designed to be used alongside the reading of the corresponding chapters or “letters” in Lewis’s book *The Screwtape Letters*. While its brevity makes it easily read, *The Screwtape Letters* is not easily digested. Note that the title for each chapter in this study guide reflects a major theme of the corresponding letter; while the letters in Lewis’s book are numbered, they are not otherwise titled.

It is recommended that you read the chapters aloud to increase your reading comprehension. Another alternative would be to use one of the audio recordings of *The Screwtape Letters*, of which several are available and can be found by a search on the internet.

For each of the thirty-one letters, you'll find a key quote to look for within the letter and some questions to consider or discuss with others. It's recommended that you work through the study questions for each section of the letters before moving on to the next Letter. To best utilize the study questions, you will find it helpful to number the paragraphs in each letter as the study questions will sometimes refer to the paragraph number in the letter using the following symbol: ¶.

One approach would be to study one letter per day to give you time to reflect upon what you've learned rather than rushing through the book. In this way, you could complete the study in thirty-one days or one month.

In response to the diabolical strategies presented in each letter by Screwtape and Wormwood, we've included two divine strategies that we encourage you to implement in your personal life as you do spiritual warfare against the world, the flesh, and the devil. These include a Scripture verse to pray and meditate on and a suggested godly action or step to complete as a preemptive strike against the schemes of the enemy.

At the end of the study guide, you'll find a chart to give you the big picture of *The Screwtape Letters*. For each letter this includes the Themes, Diabolical Strategies and Divine Strategies in an easy-to-see format.

## **STEP 2: DISCUSSING *THE SCREWTAPE LETTERS* IN A SMALL GROUP**

Having gained a detailed understanding of *The Screwtape Letters* through your personal reading and use of the study guide, you can go even deeper by studying in community. Thus, we encourage you to go through this study guide with a small group.

When your group meets to discuss the book, you can use the study questions you've previously, personally worked through to facilitate

discussion. You might also share what the Lord has taught you personally through the study and ways that you are praying, living, and sharing your faith differently because of the study.

At the beginning of each study, we encourage you to pray through the full armor of God as expressed by Paul in Ephesians 6:1–10, asking the Lord to place His armor upon you as you examine the devil’s playbook for temptation. At the end of each session, take time to pray for one another as you go out into the world to love and serve the Lord.

One approach for organizing your small group study would be to divide it into seven weekly sessions.

- 1) **Introductory Meeting:** Hand out books and study guides or arrange for participants to obtain these items in advance of the introductory meeting. Have each of you share a 5-minute testimony of your faith journey. Then share what your experience has been in the past in regard to your understanding or experience of spiritual warfare. Pray for one another and agree to do your homework prior to the next meeting of reading and answering the study questions and the Divine Strategies to Practice in the study guide for Letters 1–5.
- 2) **Meeting 2:** Discussion on Letters 1–5 by using the study questions, Sharing and Prayer.
- 3) **Meeting 3:** Discussion on Letters 6–10 by using the study questions, Sharing and Prayer.
- 4) **Meeting 4:** Discussion on Letters 11–15 by using the study questions, Sharing and Prayer.
- 5) **Meeting 5:** Discussion on Letters 16–20 by using the study questions, Sharing and Prayer.
- 6) **Meeting 6:** Discussion on Letters 20–25 by using the study questions, Sharing and Prayer.
- 7) **Final Meeting:** Discussion on Letters 26–31 by using the study questions, Sharing and Prayer.

**Each session would include:**

- Discussion of some of the letters using the study questions.
- Sharing what you have learned or been struck by from the study and ways that you've made or would like to make changes in your thinking or life due to the study of those letters.
- Prayer for one another.



**THE DEVIL AND SPIRITUAL WARFARE:  
BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES**

by Tom Tarrants, D.Min. *President Emeritus*,  
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(This article was originally published in a series of articles titled, “Hindrances to Discipleship,” in the CSLI journal *Knowing and Doing*. The series can be found at [www.cslewisinstitute.org](http://www.cslewisinstitute.org)).

There are three major hindrances to following Jesus Christ: the world, the flesh, and the devil (Eph. 2:1–3). In this article, we will briefly look at the devil and how he works to hinder our progress in the life of grace and how to recognize his schemes and resist him.

**WIDESPREAD BLINDNESS**

Humanity in every era has had blind spots, and ours is no exception. A notable example in our day is the denial of the existence of the devil. Secularization, driven along by a naturalism that denies the existence of anything spiritual or metaphysical, has had a profound effect on Americans in general. And (sadly) on believers, too. In 2002 Barna Research reported that “Six out of ten Americans (59%) rejected the existence of Satan, indicating that the devil, or Satan, is merely a symbol of evil.”<sup>1</sup> In 2009 Barna reported that 59 percent of professing Christians

also rejected the existence of Satan.<sup>2</sup> Only 26 percent strongly agreed that they believe Satan is real.

Unlike our ancestors, we hear few sermons today about “things unseen,” such as heaven, angels, hell, or demons. And most believers give little thought to the reality of spiritual battle that surrounds them. Church historian Richard Lovelace says, “A study of this subject throughout the history of Christian experience reveals that leaders in most other periods of the church’s history have found conflict with fallen angels to be a regular feature of their daily existence and have sought to cope with it in biblical terms.”<sup>3</sup> Commenting on this strange state of affairs, John Stott said,

It is unfashionable nowadays in the church (even while satanism flourishes outside it), to believe either in a personal devil or personal demonic intelligences under his command. But there is no obvious reason why church fashion should be the director of theology, whereas the plain teaching of Jesus and his apostles (not to mention the church of the subsequent centuries) endorsed their malevolent existence.<sup>4</sup>

### **TWO ERRORS TO AVOID**

C.S. Lewis also commented on our tendency toward imbalance in this area. “There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them.”<sup>5</sup> Clearly, American society and the many professing Christians have swung strongly to the first error.

No doubt the devil is very pleased with this development. Just as spy rings can be more effective when their existence is unknown, so the devil and his angels are more effective when people are unaware of their existence and activities. As Lovelace notes, “Most of the devil’s advantage depends on the ability to move among human affairs undetected.”<sup>6</sup>

### **INSIGHTS FROM THE BIBLE**

A careful study of the Bible, particularly the New Testament, gives us valuable and much-needed insights about the devil, his schemes, and

how to avoid being ensnared by him. And never has the need been greater. As J.I. Packer said concerning the devil and spiritual warfare, “The Christian’s life is not a bed of roses; it is a battlefield on which he has constantly to fight for his life. The first rule of success in war is know your enemy”.<sup>7</sup> John Stott agreed and offered wise advice about knowing our enemy: “We need to rid our minds of the medieval caricature of Satan. Dispensing with the horns, the hooves, and the tail, we are left with the biblical portrait of a spiritual being, highly intelligent, immensely powerful, and utterly unscrupulous.”<sup>8</sup>

When we turn to the biblical portrait, we learn that Satan (Hebrew: adversary) or the devil (Greek: slanderer) is the archenemy of God and the cruel and malicious adversary of those created in God’s image. Names like adversary, slanderer, tempter, deceiver, liar, murderer, accuser, and evil one are applied to him in the Bible, and these give a sense of his character. He is an evil supernatural being, a fallen angel of such rank and power that even the archangel Michael, when disputing with him, “did not presume to pronounce a blasphemous judgment, but said, ‘The Lord rebuke you’” (Jude 9).<sup>9</sup> However, he is a created being, and is not eternal, self-existent, or equal to God in any respect. Thus he is not omnipresent, omniscient, or omnipotent. And he cannot read our thoughts and does not know the future. Rather, the devil is a creature subject to God’s sovereign restraint and can go no further than God permits (Job 1–2). He was decisively defeated by Jesus at the cross, but he is still at large and is a dangerous foe until Christ’s second coming (Matt. 25:41).

### THE DEVIL’S ORIGIN AND EXTENT OF SPIRITUAL CONFLICT

How Satan became evil is not explained in the Bible, though there are hints that ambitious pride prompted his revolt against God (1 Tim. 3:6). His pride and arrogance are certainly evident in his temptation of Eve (Gen. 3:1–5) and of Jesus (Luke 4:5–7). Some scholars have suggested that there might be poetic allusions to Satan’s fall in Isaiah 14:12–14 and Ezekiel 28:11–19. These two passages depict the willfulness of the king of Babylon and the pride of the king of Tyre but seem to far transcend

what properly can be said of them. This raises the interesting but unanswerable question of whether there might also be a veiled reference to Satan energizing and working through them in the background.

Whatever the origin of Satan's fall, it is clear that other angels joined his rebellion and now form an organized hierarchy under his command (Eph. 6:10–12).<sup>10</sup> They wage war against God and His people, seeking to advance their evil designs throughout the world and gain total control. As we have seen, the opening salvo in this war came when Satan, working through a serpent, deceived Eve and enticed her to disobey God, bringing about the fall of the human race (Gen. 3:1–7). This gave him great influence over fallen people and their societies. How much influence does he have in the world? When tempting Jesus, "The devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, and said to him, "To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours" (Luke 4:5–7).

Interestingly, Jesus did not dispute the devil's claim to having significant authority over the kingdoms of this world (perhaps gained at the Fall). Jesus spoke of Satan's kingdom (Matt. 12:26) and referred to him as the "ruler of this world" (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). John the apostle says that "the whole world lies in the power of the evil one" (1 John 5:19). And the apostle Paul refers to him as "the god of this world" (2 Cor. 4:4) and "the prince of the power of the air" (Eph. 2:2). Although the devil does not have absolute control over the world, he and his angels do have considerable ability to create harm in pursuit of their evil goals. He can cause a range of catastrophic events, including physical afflictions and even death (Job 1–2; Luke 13:16; Heb. 2:14). His demons are able to afflict and torment people in a variety of ways, many instances of which are recounted in the Gospels. But it is of course important to note that not all physical and mental afflictions come from the devil.

## THE DEVIL'S GOALS AND MAIN TARGETS

From this and what Scripture shows elsewhere, we can safely say that the devil's goals are to reclaim or at least neutralize God's people, to destroy



the church, to overthrow the kingdom of God, to displace God as King of creation and to become the object of all worship. This helps explain much of the evil and suffering that rages on earth. Here, Lovelace explains that normally,

The destructive malice of Satan against all humanity, and particularly against the church, is channeled through human agents and the systems and institutions they have built. Humanity in general is afflicted by the destroyer through the structures of injustice and oppression of which the flesh and the devil are joint architects, and Christians are murderously attacked by individuals and governments ultimately directed by Satan.<sup>11</sup>

We see evidence of this in the political realm from nearly the beginning of time. Evil spirits seek to influence governments, their leaders and world affairs to advance Satan's purposes. A brief glimpse is given in Daniel 10:13–14, where the “prince of the kingdom of Persia,” an evil spirit of high rank and power, resisted one of God's angels who was sent to Persia to answer Daniel's prayer. He held God's angel at bay for twenty-one days, until the archangel Michael arrived to assist him. After delivering his message to Daniel, the good angel took leave to “return to fight against the prince of Persia; and behold, when I go out, the prince of Greece will come” (Dan. 10:20). Another example, this one in the New Testament, is Nero's persecution of the church in AD 64–65. Peter, Paul, and many other believers in Rome were put to death, often in unimaginably cruel ways by this madman. Writing on the eve of that persecution, Peter seems to suggest that the devil was behind the gathering storm (1 Pet. 5:8–9). And in view of Nero's character and behavior, that seems likely. In Smyrna three decades later, we are told that the devil worked through the machinery of government to bring about the arrest and execution of God's people in that city (Rev. 2:10). In recent times, examples abound of widespread demonic evil perpetrated through governments influenced by atheistic ideologies such as Marxism and Nazism, and through religious ideologies like radical Islam. This invisible but very real spiritual war continues to rage around the world.

Religion and its institutions are another of the devil's prime targets for influence and control. By inspiring and energizing false religions, the devil can deceive people and blind them to the true God. The pagan religions of Canaan, for example, were demonically controlled (Deut. 32:17; Ps. 106:37) and were a great snare to Israel for centuries. In New Testament times, Paul said Greco-Roman pagan idolatry was also energized by demons (1 Cor. 10:18–22). But it is in the church itself that the devil seeks to make his greatest impact. Paul warns believers in Corinth about false apostles and workers, saying that “Satan disguises himself as an angel of light...his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness” (2 Cor. 11:14–15). False teaching is often their mode of operation.

From the beginning of the church, the devil has used error, deception, division, sexual temptation, persecution, and a variety of other schemes to undermine congregations and institutions. He has also used these means to hinder ministers, missionaries, and others engaged in preaching and teaching God's truth and spreading the gospel, including Paul (see 1 Thess. 2:17–18). And he has successfully captured many religious schools and theological seminaries that train ministers for the church, turning them into factories of error and heresy. In some cases, entire denominational hierarchies have been captured. False religions and heresies have been a persistent problem throughout the centuries and today are perhaps more numerous and widespread than at any time in history. Interestingly, Paul warns that in the last days, people especially will be particularly at risk from “deceitful spirits and teachings of demons” (1 Tim. 4:1).

Social, cultural, and secular educational institutions are also prime targets. Harvard was founded in 1636 by Puritans to train an educated clergy for the colonies. By 1701, it had become so liberal that some of its graduates founded what became Yale College to train Congregationalist ministers. Yale became liberal some years later. Princeton was founded in 1746 to train orthodox ministers because Harvard and Yale had opposed the Great Awakening. The same basic story occurred in other Ivy League schools and in many, many others over the centuries.

The world of ideas, the world of music and art in their various forms,

popular culture, and the media are all arenas through which the evil one can subtly gain influence and disseminate anti-God ideas on a widespread basis with seeming plausibility. For example, the ideas of Marx, Nietzsche, and others like them have produced enormous evil and human suffering. The influence of existentialism on the youth culture of the 1960s is perhaps another example. Today's postmodernism and post-postmodernism is yet another. Of course, this is not to say that all philosophies and expressions of the world's culture are demonic, only to say that they are vulnerable to exploitation by the devil, and some more than others. Undiscerning people can be brought under their influence.

The personal life is where everyone must be especially alert. In Ephesians, Paul warns ordinary church members against the "schemes of the devil." He says, "...we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against rulers, against authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (Eph: 6:11-12). This language describes an organized hierarchy of evil spirits that is arrayed against individual believers, churches, and even institutions of society. Thus, Paul exhorts the Ephesians to "take up the whole armor of God that you might be able to withstand in the evil day" (6:13). This is essential for every believer.

Peter says much the same: "Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world" (1 Pet. 5:8-9).

### THE DEVIL'S SCHEMES AND TACTICS

How does the devil seek to ensnare us? Deception, accusation, and temptation are his standard tools. His chief goal for anyone who has come to Christ is to recover them. As J.I. Packer says of such a person, "Satan views him as an escaped prisoner and goes to war against him to try to recapture him. He tempts (i.e., tests) the Christian with malicious intent, hoping to find a weakness and betray him into a course of action that will ultimately lead him back into the prison out of which Christ brought him."<sup>12</sup>

Specific approaches vary, but normally he tempts us to sin in our areas of weakness and vulnerability. Packer observes that “he is always seeking to produce unbelief, pride, unreality, false hopes, confusion of mind and disobedience, as he did in Eden; if he cannot do this directly then he labors to do it indirectly, fostering unbalance and one-sidedness.”<sup>13</sup> Examples in the Bible are illustrative. As we saw earlier, he ensnared Peter by means of fear (Luke 22:31–32). He filled the hearts of Ananias and Sapphira with lies (Acts 5:1–11). He captures many with sexual lust (1 Cor. 5:1). Paul warns married couples in Corinth who were devoting themselves to special prayer not to refrain from sex for too long, because “Satan may tempt you because of your lack of self-control” (1 Cor. 7:5). Pride is a common snare (1 Tim. 3:6). Anger is a special danger and must be dealt with promptly and properly when it arises (Eph. 4:26–27). And there are many others. When we succumb to the devil’s temptation, it is not uncommon for him to exploit guilt and condemnation in an effort to push us toward despondency and despair.

Looking at temptation more broadly, Lovelace says, “Most commonly, temptation is directed toward larger ends: involving believers in whole ways of life or patterns of behavior which are sub-Christian which will extinguish their spirituality and make them negative witnesses; or luring them into adopting outlooks which excuse or justify sin and which may almost totally obscure their faith.”<sup>14</sup> Materialism, worldliness, and racism are obvious examples in American evangelicalism, and there are a number of others. On the theological left, distrust of the Scriptures and disbelief in Jesus’s virgin birth, miracles, and bodily resurrection are major examples.

Each of us needs to be aware of specific sins to which we are vulnerable and work earnestly “by the Spirit...[to] put to death the deeds of the body” (Rom. 8:13). J.I. Packer gives a helpful explanation of what this means:

How do we “by the Spirit put to death the misdeeds of the body”? Outward acts of sin come from inner sinful urges, so we must learn to starve these urges of what stimulates them (porn magazines, for instance, if the urge is lust; visits to smorgasbords if the urge is gluttony; gambling and lotteries if the urge is greed, and so on). And when the urge is upon

us we must learn, as it were, to run to our Lord and cry for help, asking him to deepen our sense of his own holy presence and redeeming love, to give us the strength to say no to that which can only displease him. It is the Spirit who moves us to act in this way, who makes our sense of the holy love of Christ vivid, who imparts the strength for which we pray and who actually drains the life out of the sins we starve.<sup>15</sup>

We must remind ourselves that we are not helpless victims who cannot resist sin, for as we saw earlier, we will encounter no temptation that is not common to man. And “God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it” (1 Cor. 10:13). Sometimes the way of escape is simply to flee from temptation when it confronts us (1 Tim. 6:11).

With unbelievers, Satan’s chief goal is to blind their minds and thus keep them from seeing “the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (2 Cor. 4:4). He uses all manner of schemes to entice them into sins and idolatries that will keep them under his influence and away from God. Thus, “They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart” (Eph. 4:18). And should they ever hear the word of God, he immediately snatches it away from them (Matt. 13:19).

### **RESISTING THE DEVIL**

What are our defenses against such an enemy? We must regularly remind ourselves that the devil was decisively defeated by Jesus at the Cross. Jesus came into the world to destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8). And by shedding His blood on the cross, Christ broke the devil’s power (John 12:27–31; Col. 2:13–15; Heb. 2:14–16), paid the penalty of our sins, and opened the door of salvation to all who repent and trust in Him. We must also regularly remind ourselves that God is for us, not against us and that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:31, 37–39). This will enable us to rediscover our own liberation (Col. 2:13–15) and the authority Jesus has given us over the

powers of darkness (Luke 10:17–19), and it will help us learn to exercise it rightly for our own good and the good of His church. This requires us to learn how to “put on the full armor of God” (Eph. 6:13f) and “Resist the devil” so that “he will flee from you” (Jas. 4:7; 1 Pet. 5:7).

One day the devil and all who serve him will be cast into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:1–3). But until that day he and his minions fight on. Thus we must daily remember that our life in this world is lived on a spiritual battlefield, and we must keep sober and alert. We must live by faith, keeping our eyes firmly fixed on Jesus our King, not the devil. As E. Stanley Jones once said, “What has your attention has you.” If the devil cannot keep us blinded, he is happy to run us off a cliff through preoccupation with his activities and paranoid fear.

### SEEING UNSEEN REALITY

Another essential for dealing with the devil is a proper perspective on reality. God and the devil are not equally matched opponents, as in some types of cosmic dualism. God is infinitely more powerful than the devil, who is one of His creatures. When God is called the Lord of hosts in the Old Testament, it refers to His position as commander of heaven’s armies—armies of angels who do His bidding. They are the vast majority of angels, far more than those which rebelled with Satan. These unseen divine agents are active in the world, serving and defending God’s people (Heb. 1:14), and battling the devil and his angels.

At the battle of Jericho, for example, the commander of the Lord’s army of invisible angels appeared to Joshua on the eve of battle to encourage him and let him know that he was not alone (Josh. 5:13–15). Another instance is when Elisha and his servant were besieged by the Syrian army, which intended to kill them. When his servant reported this to Elisha, Elisha responded, “Do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them. Then Elisha prayed and said, ‘LORD, please open his eyes that he may see.’ So the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha” (2 Kings 6:16–17). Or consider the exciting story of Peter in the New Testament. Herod had just executed James and had arrested Peter, intending to kill him as well. Peter was

in prison being guarded by four squads of soldiers. But the church made earnest prayer for him, and God sent an angel to supernaturally deliver him from prison (Acts 12:1–11). God’s angels are on assignments throughout the world obeying God’s orders in the battle against Satan and his forces (Ps. 103:19–21). And they also watch over each of His children (Heb. 1:14).

### GROWING STRONG IN GRACE

Finally, we must use all the means of grace God has provided for our growth in grace. For those who have come to faith in Christ but have not yet been baptized, this means doing so as soon as possible. For every believer, it means being filled with the Holy Spirit daily (Eph. 5:18; Gal. 5:16–25), for “he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world” (1 John 4:4), and it was in the power of the Spirit that Jesus overcame the devil (Luke 4:1). In the Spirit’s power, we must follow the example of the early church and be continually devoting ourselves to “the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42). This is far more demanding than the halfhearted efforts most of us make. J.I. Packer elaborates on each of these:

Bible truth, preached and received through preaching, studied in the text, meditated on, applied to oneself, taken into the heart, laid up in the memory, taken as a guide for life; prayer, the regular exercise of communion and fellowship with God; worship with the Lord’s people, particularly at the Lord’s Supper but also in hearing the word proclaimed and joining in the prayers and vocal praise; and the informal fellowship and interchange of the Lord’s family as one stands by and ministers to another.<sup>16</sup>

Wholehearted commitment to Christ as Lord and obedience to known truth are essential responses to God’s grace in order to keep walking in the Spirit and on the path of His blessing and protection. A spiritual mentor—whether a pastor, elder, or mature believer—will be very helpful for periodic counsel, including discernment of any subtle schemes or attacks of the devil against us. And our commitment to fellowship should include a small accountability group (two or three people). Last, but by

no means least, we must understand and actually put on the full armor of God (Eph. 6:10–18) and keep it in place day by day.

These disciplines will keep us under the protective canopy of God’s grace and keep us growing as disciples of Jesus. They will not exempt us from temptation or attack, but they will enable us to glorify God by standing firm when it comes.

### RECOMMENDED READING

Borgman, Brian and Rob Ventura. *Spiritual Warfare* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2014).

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Lewis, C.S. *Mere Christianity*. Book 3, chap. 8, “The Great Sin” (New York: Harper Collins, 1952).

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Barna Report.

<sup>2</sup> Barna Report.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1979), 134.

<sup>4</sup> John Stott, *God’s New Society: The Message of Ephesians* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1979), 73–74.

<sup>5</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (New York: MacMillan, 1944), 9.

<sup>6</sup> Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 136.

<sup>7</sup> J.I. Packer, *God’s Words* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1981), 85.

<sup>8</sup> John Stott, *What Christ Thinks of the Church* (Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw, 1990), 50.

<sup>9</sup> Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version.

<sup>10</sup> Stott, *God’s New Society*, 267–275.

<sup>11</sup> Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 140.

<sup>12</sup> Packer, *God’s Words*, 91.

<sup>13</sup> Packer, *God’s Words*, 92.

<sup>14</sup> Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 137.

<sup>15</sup> J.I. Packer, *Rediscovering Holiness* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant, 1992), 175.

<sup>16</sup> J.I. Packer, “Means of Growth” (an article in *Tenth*, a publication of Tenth Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia, 1981), 10.



## INTRODUCTION TO *THE SCREWTAPE LETTERS*

The year 2022 marked the eightieth anniversary of the publication of C.S. Lewis's *The Screwtape Letters*. Even though the book initially sold well, Lewis indicated in the preface to an early edition of the work that he was worried that the book would eventually be quietly banished “toward spare bedrooms, there to live a life of undisturbed tranquility.” Yet eighty years after it was first published, the series of letters from a senior devil named Screwtape addressed to his underling Wormwood on how to corrupt the life of Wormwood's nameless “patient” remains a regular on Christian bestseller lists.

The idea for *The Screwtape Letters* came to Lewis while he was sitting in church. In a 1940 letter to his brother, Warnie, he wrote, “Before the service was over—one could wish these things came seasonably—I was struck by an idea for a book which I think might be most useful and entertaining. It would be called *As One Devil to Another* and would consist of letters from an elderly retired devil to a young devil who has just started work on his first ‘patient.’”

Before *The Screwtape Letters* appeared in book form, they were published as a series of thirty-one installments in a weekly religious magazine known as *The Guardian* (no relation to the more well-known British daily currently publishing under the same name). The first letter was published on May 2, 1941.

Although popular with most readers, some didn't quite grasp the underlying concept. A country clergyman wrote to *The Guardian* to cancel his subscription because he found Screwtape's advice to Wormwood, “not only erroneous but positively diabolical.” Shortly thereafter, the letters were released in a single volume in February 1942.

Notwithstanding the confused clergyman, the book was Lewis's first commercial success, bringing him out of the academic periphery and into the spotlight.

Lewis dedicated *The Screwtape Letters* to his close friend J.R.R. Tolkien, writing under the printed dedication in Tolkien's copy, “In token payment of a great debt.” Ironically, Tolkien, author of *The Lord of the Rings*, and a strong Christian with a belief in the supernatural world, was

not keen on the book as he didn't think it wise to trifle with the powers of evil in such a facetious manner.

However, if you take a moment to read the two quotations Lewis included in the book between his dedication to Tolkien and the Preface, you'll find that Lewis is in good company when it comes to the idea of making fun of the devil. The quotations are from the great Reformer Martin Luther and the English statesman Thomas More.

Lewis's previous books, such as *The Pilgrim's Regress*, *The Allegory of Love*, and *The Problem of Pain*, were more abstract and theoretical. In *The Screwtape Letters*, Lewis employed satire to reach his target audience.

Lewis described that target audience in a 1947 letter to a gentleman who had contacted him about adding an index to *The Screwtape Letters*. Lewis responded, "the success of the book depends on luring the ordinary reader into a serious self-knowledge under pretense of being kind of a joke... But it is the worldly reader I specifically want to catch."

It's uncertain to what extent *The Screwtape Letters*' readership includes the "worldly" readers that Lewis originally targeted. But in a culture that has become increasingly polarized by religion, politics, sexuality, and race (a development Screwtape himself would most assuredly approve of), more than likely the majority of *The Screwtape Letters*' current readers are now the religiously inclined or those with an existing faith tradition. For this demographic, *The Screwtape Letters* are helpful in thinking how to be "as wise as serpents, yet gentle as doves."

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 that 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 Screwtape Letters* show that there are no ordinary actions. It is a battle all the way from here to heaven.

Taken as a whole, it is not possible to distill *The Screwtape Letters* down to a single topic, but the metanarrative throughout is Screwtape's twisting

of the truth. Without truth, or an objective standard, humanity's beliefs and behaviors can be molded and shaped. But it is not just that he twists the truth, or "T"ruth. Screwtape understands that a lie is made far stronger by mixing in a little truth. For the patient, marriage is fine, as long as it occurs with someone who does not follow the Enemy. Attending Church is fine, as long as it is a Church that is doctrinally malignant. Even Christianity can be fine, as long as it is an insignificantly small part of the patient's whole life.

Some have noted that reading the *The Screwtape Letters* is not a pleasant experience. This may be because it is not a book you read; it is a book that reads you. 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."

Within the pages of *The Screwtape Letters*, C.S. Lewis has presented us with a gift, insight into Ephesians 6:12 where Paul describes the Christian life in this way,

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. (ESV)

It is our hope and prayer at the C.S. Lewis Institute that this guide will help you recognize in advance the trap doors set for us by these "powers," so we can avoid them and go on to live the lives of obedience, purity, and joy that God has called each of us to.

### **SUMMARY OF THE BOOK'S NARRATIVE AND APPROACH**

The dust jacket of the first American edition of *The Screwtape Letters* published by The Macmillan Company of New York in 1944 provides a good synopsis of the book. It reads,

This extraordinary little book is a startling, unique, and powerful presentation of the old, old problem of the continuous battle for the soul of man between the insidious forces of evil and the triumphant forces of good.

It consists of a series of letters written by Screwtape (an important official in his Satanic Majesty's "Lowerarchy") to Wormwood, his nephew, who is a junior devil on earth. The letters are instruction in temptation as to how to corrupt the faith of Wormwood's "patient," who is in danger of becoming a Christian.

The book sparkles with wit and reveals on every page a penetrating understanding of man's spiritual struggle upward toward the City of God.

Lewis places the historical context behind this fictional work during the Second World War, which was at the forefront of everyone's minds when these letters were first published in *The Guardian* newspaper.

Since Lewis is writing from the perspective of the demon or lower devil, Screwtape, it can take the reader a moment to switch gears and realize that what the devil describes as good is bad and what is bad is good. In other words, the reader must see this as the devil's playbook and thus must read accordingly.

Note Lewis's statement in the Preface about reading the book that "Readers are advised to remember that the devil is a liar. Not everything that Screwtape says should be assumed to be true even from his own angle." With this in mind, as you go through this study, pray, and ask the Lord for discernment between truth and error, right and wrong as you respond to both the readings and the study guide questions.

### MAIN CHARACTERS IN *THE SCREWTAPE LETTERS*

**Screwtape (Experienced lower devil):** The letters of this book are written in the voice of Screwtape, who is an undersecretary in the "lowerarchy" of Satan's Hell. In other words, he is a devil or demon with some experience. He has been charged with training his nephew, an inexperienced devil named Wormwood. Screwtape's perspective is one in which God is the "Enemy," and the devil is "Our Father Below." His goal is to corrupt the man in the story, the "patient," and put him on the path to hell.

**Wormwood (Inexperienced devil in training):** Wormwood is the incompetent devil in training, and the nephew of Screwtape who addresses his letters Wormwood. His job on earth is to corrupt the “patient” and lead him to hell. However, Wormwood’s youthful mistakes and the overwhelming power of “the Enemy” (God) make his mission difficult to accomplish.

**The Patient (Young Englishman):** The patient is a young Englishman who lives during World War II. He is contemplating the truths of Christianity. The letters from Screwtape to Wormwood explore ways to lead the patient astray through various aspects of his life, including his thought life, interactions with church goers, his love life, and his service as a soldier. In the end, the patient finds God’s truth and overcomes the schemes of the devil.

**The Patient’s Fiancée (Godly young woman):** The patient’s fiancée is a lovely young Christian woman, full of Christian virtues. She introduces the “patient” to her Christian family and a whole new set of friends. Of course, Screwtape abhors the influence of this godly fiancée on the patient.

**The Enemy (God):** From Screwtape’s perspective, the Enemy (God) is unfathomable because he loves “human vermin.” God is in a spiritual battle against the devil and the underling devils for the souls of men and women to whom He’s given freewill to choose sides.

**Our Father Below (The Devil):** Screwtape is subservient to “Our Father Below,” the devil. The devil is battling for the souls of men and women against his foe, the “Enemy” (God).



**Appendix:**  
**Overview Chart of Themes,  
Diabolical Strategies and Divine  
Strategies Based on the Letters  
within *The Screwtape Letters***

## APPENDIX

### CSLI STUDY GUIDE • *The Screwtape Letters* by C.S. Lewis

THEME OF THE LETTER	DIABOLICAL STRATEGY	DIVINE STRATEGY
1. Pre-conversion	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Jargon</li> <li>2. Appetites</li> </ol>	Science and reason
2. Church	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Unconverted habits</li> <li>2. The straw-man church</li> <li>3. Straw-man Christians</li> <li>4. Innate hypocrisy</li> </ol>	Disappointment
3. Family	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Introspection</li> <li>2. Vacuous prayers</li> <li>3. Irritating habits</li> <li>4. Annoying communication</li> <li>5. Religious irritation</li> </ol>	Process and stages
4. Prayer	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Devotional mood</li> <li>2. Spiritual feelings</li> <li>3. Childish images</li> </ol>	Intentional discipline of prayer
5. War	Long-term medical care	Responding to desperation
6. War continued	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Worry for the future</li> <li>2. Self-conscious/unself-conscious</li> <li>3. Imaginary virtues</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The Present</li> <li>2. Active virtues</li> </ol>
7. Devils, patriots, and pacifists	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Spiritual ignorance</li> <li>2. Christianity as means for a cause</li> </ol>	Intervention
8. Dry and desert experiences	Opposing God's intentions	The law of undulation
9. Life phases	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Troughs and down times</li> <li>2. Twisted pleasure</li> <li>3. Phases</li> </ol>	Pleasure
10. Cliques	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Snobbery</li> <li>2. Peer pressure</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Inclusion</li> <li>2. Integrity</li> </ol>

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THEME OF THE LETTER	DIABOLICAL STRATEGY	DIVINE STRATEGY
11. Humor	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Humor as consolation and excuse</li> <li>2. Humor as flippancy</li> </ol>	Joy and fun
12. Sloth	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Small sins</li> <li>2. Spiritual drift</li> </ol>	Intruding on our spiritual slumber
13. Pain and pleasure	Eradication of strong personal taste.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Good books, country roads, real pain and pleasure</li> <li>2. Godly detachment</li> </ol>
14. Humility	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Self-consciousness</li> <li>2. Distortion about the true nature of humility</li> </ol>	Humility Self-forgetfulness
15. Time and eternity	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Suppressing both eternal and the present</li> <li>2. Worry about the future</li> </ol>	Present and eternity.
16. Church hopping	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Diluted Christianity</li> <li>2. Opinionated pastors</li> <li>3. Party and cliques</li> </ol>	Diversity and discernment
17. Gluttony	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Delicacy</li> <li>2. Male and female gluttony</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Fasting</li> <li>2. Proper enjoyment of food</li> </ol>
18. Sex	Romantic love	Abstinence or monogamy
19. Love	Twisted love	Love
20. Sex, love, and marriage	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Twisted sexual desires</li> <li>2. Terrestrial/infernal Venus</li> </ol>	Direct action
21. Pride and peevishness	Conquest	Creation



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THEME OF THE LETTER	DIABOLICAL STRATEGY	DIVINE STRATEGY
22. Love	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Lure of the opposite sex</li> <li>2. Noise</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Pleasure</li> <li>2. Love</li> <li>3. Music and silence</li> </ol>
23. Jesus	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Historical Jesus</li> <li>2. Christianity as a means of social justice.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Great moralists</li> <li>2. Resurrection and Redemption</li> </ol>
24. Godly influence	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Convention</li> <li>2. Spiritual pride</li> <li>3. Spiritual confusion</li> <li>4. The inner ring</li> </ol>	Spiritual influence of others
25. Pleasure and the same old thing	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Christianity and ...</li> <li>2. Novelty and Fashion</li> </ol>	Rhythm and “platitudes”
26. Unselfishness	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Twisting love</li> <li>2. Twisting eros</li> </ol>	Charity and true love
27. Prayer and time	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. False spirituality</li> <li>2. Historical point of view</li> </ol>	Prayer and distraction
28. The corruption of aging	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Middle age</li> <li>2. Attrition and attachment</li> <li>3. Idealization of youth</li> <li>4. “Experience is the mother of illusion”</li> </ol>	Detachment
29. Twisted virtues	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Hatred</li> <li>2. Cowardice</li> </ol>	Virtue and the value of morality
30. Confusing what is false and real	Fatigue and weakness	Truth and faith
31. Deliverance	None available to devil in heaven	Life beyond death