

The Screwtape Letters (Chapter 9)

Why did C.S. Lewis write this book?

1. **To show temptation from the enemy's point of view.**

Lewis wrote *The Screwtape Letters* to portray “the psychology of temptation from the other side,” allowing readers to see how the demonic mind reasons. By overhearing devils at work, Christians can recognize patterns of temptation that are otherwise hard to perceive in themselves.

2. **To strip evil of its false glamour.**

Lewis deliberately presents Hell as petty, bureaucratic, and joyless in order to make vice appear unattractive rather than exciting. Evil is shown not as dramatic rebellion but as mean-spirited, repetitive, and boring.

3. **To warn Christians about subtle, ordinary temptations.**

The letters focus on small sins, distractions, habits, and gradual drift rather than spectacular moral failures. Lewis wanted readers to see that spiritual ruin usually comes “by inches,” through neglect and self-deception.

As you read, be on the lookout for the ways each letter contributes to these goals.

Questions

1. *What stood out to you from this chapter? How were Lewis' motivations for writing demonstrated?*
2. *What did you find challenging to hear (to agree with) or understand?*
3. *What, if anything, was encouraging to you?*

Strategies (Exploitation)

1. **Pleasure.** Wormwood is instructed to exploit the patient's use of pleasure, especially when he is in a spiritual "trough," as a means of drawing him toward a disastrous end. In particular, Screwtape urges the manipulation of sensual pleasure during such seasons of weakness. Though sensual pleasure is in itself good and created by God, when the patient is in a trough its pursuit can be redirected toward ruin. This most commonly occurs through pleasures such as sex and drink which, when detached from their proper ends, become tools of distortion. When the patient is weak, he can be encouraged "to work away from the natural condition of any pleasure to that in which it is least natural, least redolent of its Maker, and least pleasurable," thus achieving Hell's ultimate aim: "to get the man's soul and give him nothing in return."
2. **Ignorance.** Wormwood's second strategy is to push the patient, while in a spiritual "trough," toward ignorance of the Law of Undulation. Success here allows several outcomes, depending on the patient's temperament. If the patient is prone to despair, Wormwood is to keep him isolated from mature Christians who provide perspective and hope. If the patient tends toward wishful thinking, he is encouraged to settle into complacency by appealing to "moderation in all things," since "a moderated religion is as good for us as no religion at all—and more amusing." Finally, if the patient resigns himself to the permanence of his condition, Wormwood consoles him by persuading him that faith was merely an "adolescent phase" one naturally outgrows.

Counter-Strategies

1. **First**, we should practice self-control. Regular disciplines such as fasting strengthen the will, training a person to say no to good desires so that he is better prepared to resist sinful ones.
2. **Second**, we should establish clear boundaries around vulnerable areas of life—for example, committing to drink only on days of joy rather than during seasons of sadness.
3. **Finally**, we should seek out a "nothing-friend": an experienced Christian from whom "nothing is kept secret," whose steady faith provides emotional and spiritual support (Phil 3:17).