

Much of this summary and the chapter summaries are drawn from Alan Vermilye's Study Guide on the Screwtape Letters



## Book Summary

*Our cause is never more in danger than when a human, no longer desiring, but still intending, to do our Enemy's will, looks round upon a universe from which every trace of him seems to have vanished, and asks why he has been forsaken, and still obeys. — Screwtape*

Why do we sometimes succeed spiritually, and at other times we fail? Are there a host of spiritual forces battling to influence the choices we make, or are we left to our own devices? The Screwtape Letters by C.S. Lewis provides unique insight into the battles that are being waged in the spiritual world. The story is told through a collection of letters from Screwtape, an undersecretary in the lowerarchy of Hell, to his incompetent nephew, Wormwood. Wormwood is a junior devil who has just been given his first human, a young man (referred to as the patient), to corrupt and secure for

eternity.

The story takes place in England during the tumultuous years of World War II with the man contemplating Christianity. However, another setting could very easily be his consciousness where another war is taking place for his soul. Each letter is filled with detailed instructions from Screwtape to Wormwood on how to best enter the man's thoughts and subtly influence his choices thereby guiding him closer to Hell.

There is nothing extraordinary about this man's life, but from the moment of contemplating faith until his last breath, he undergoes spiritual attack. Like most young adults, he is influenced by culture, materialistic friends, and the media. Each provides excellent distractions from his spiritual journey, but his quest for spiritual truth wins out, and eventually he becomes a Christian. Early on, he struggles with balancing the unrealistic expectations of being an ideal Christian with what he encounters in the world, the church, his family, and daily life. The strange habits and hypocrisies of fellow church members and the prospect of his own mother doubting his new-found faith were unexpected, but they did not discourage him.

Building a dedicated prayer life becomes one of his top priorities. Battling everyday distractions, he quickly learns that being completely transparent with God is hard but also refreshing.

Living during a time of war, the man knows it's only a matter of time before he must make a stand. What is the Christian response to war? Should he take up arms and fight for his

country against an evil tyrant, or should he refuse on moral grounds? He decides in favor of military service and now must learn to control his fear and hatred of a distant enemy whom he has never met.

As with life, the Christian journey is filled with mountain-top and valley experiences. Various trials and temptations common to all men come his way. He resolves to rise above each and finds himself strengthened with a renewed sense of self along the way.

He soon becomes aware that building relationships in a world hostile to his faith is difficult. He knows that he is to be in the world but not of the world. As a result he must distance himself from the negative influences in his life while maintaining relationships that he can either positively influence or be encouraged by.

Overtime with the busyness and noise of everyday life, he finds himself drifting away from his faith. It's so gradual at first that he does not notice he's slipping back into old habits. He's quickly awakened from his spiritual drift by experiencing real, simple pleasures that allow him to recover and recommit fully to his faith.

This experience has a dramatic impact on his life. He develops a true sense of humility and becomes less anxious about the war. He continues to battle sensual temptations, but he fully commits himself to abstinence prior to marriage and monogamy if he is to get married.

He soon falls in love with a dedicated Christian girl. Her charitable and loving family welcomes him into their home and introduces him to a new circle of friends who all share the

same values and beliefs. He feels content in his new circumstances but also humble and grateful. The war is moving closer to home, and his prayers intensify appealing directly to God for guidance. During an air raid he does not perform any spectacular act of heroism, but he sticks to his post and fulfills his duties even in the face of great danger and fear. He learns to manage his emotions and fatigue while still maintaining hope.

The climax comes at the end of the book when the man dies in a subsequent air raid. As he is ushered into Heaven, his eyes are opened to witness the spiritual warfare that has surrounded his life. In this state of grace, he fully realizes that his death was the apex of the battle for his soul, and now he can rest knowing that he is safe.

Lewis masterfully provides a great analogy between the external war and the spiritual war raging inside the man. Both require great endurance, perseverance, and bravery, and the man's response to it, as with all life circumstances, is what ultimately shaped who he was and whose he was.

This story can easily be our story. In everyday life situations, we can choose God's will or evil's will, but we always have a choice. From the Christian perspective, to be ignorant of the spiritual realm and demonic strategies to influence choices and exploit our weakness is dangerous. Fortunately, as Christians we have been sealed with the Holy Spirit who provides us clarity of thought and cuts through devilish manipulations so that we might discover refreshing, simple, and straightforward truth.

# Character Summary

## **SCREWTAPE**

Screwtape is a very formidable demon and an undersecretary in the lowerarchy of Hell. He is subtle. smart. arrogant. clever, hate— filled. and vicious with no love or regard for human beings. His job is to provide guidance and direction to young tempters out in the field. He is an experienced. older demon who understands a great deal about human nature and would love nothing more than to corrupt and damn man to an eternity of Hell.

Each letter is written by Screwtape and addressed to his nephew. Wormwood. The narrative is told in his voice. At times he appears affable to Wormwood. but he can also be very condescending with little patience for this young demon and easily frustrated by his irresponsibility. He quickly lets him know who the more superior demon is when Wormwood tries to betray him.

Screwtape refers to God as the "Enemy" and Satan as "Our Father Below." He is a bureaucrat well versed in history as well as rules and regulations. He knows how to manipulate the inner workings of the departments of Hell to obtain what he needs. and he is an ardent patriot to his cause and a connoisseur of those demons who are not.

## **WORMWOOD**

Wormwood is Screwtape's incompetent nephew serving under his tutelage. This young demon's job, to whom all the letters are written, is to condemn the patient he has been assigned to

Hell. Wormwood is irresponsible. lazy, and immature. Being portrayed as one full of youthful ignorance. Wormwood would rather put his efforts into less effective methods while allowing Uncle Screwtape to do all the heavy lifting. Even though he is constantly chided by Screwtape for his numerous blunders. he remains optimistic that everything will be all right.

He would love nothing more than to reveal himself to his patient and to spend his time enjoying the human suffering brought about by war. Screwtape believes the irresponsible Wormwood is shirking his duties of performing the necessary research about his subject and human nature for more fanciful but less damaging methods of condemning the patient.

In the end, his failure is evident, and Wormwood appeals to his Uncle Screwtape for mercy of which there is none.

## **THE PATIENT**

The patient is an ordinary young man living in England during the tumultuous years of World War II. His contemplation of Christianity and subsequent daily actions and thoughts are the subject of the letters between Screwtape and Wormwood. He is thoughtful, honest, intellectual, sincere and fully aware of his weaknesses. His newfound faith and the realization of the power negative influences have on his life bring about an examination of those friends whom he enjoys spending time with. He also learns that simple, ordinary pleasures are enough to sustain him when he finds his faith drifting.

The patient finds moral strength within him as he battles a series of sexual temptations that lessen with each resistance.

His courage is also put to the test as he bravely and honorably serves his country during the war. As a soldier, he eventually gives his life and is immediately ushered into presence of God.

### **THE PATIENT'S FIANCÉ**

The patient's fiancé is a kind, loving, attractive, and dedicated young Christian woman. She is a virgin, full of virtues, and portrayed as an extraordinarily good person—just the sort of human that Screwtape loathes. He sees her as vile, sneaking, mouse-like, watery, and insignificant. She is just the type that Screwtape would have loved to see fed to the lions in the early days.

The girl comes from a charitable and loving Christian family who welcomes the patient into their home. They also introduce him to a new circle of friends who all share the same values and beliefs. Her one weakness that Screwtape desires to exploit is a narrowly defined understanding of her faith, but this is mostly due to ignorance and not spiritual pride.

### **THE PATIENT'S MOTHER**

The patient lives with his mother who is a Christian. Having taught her son Christianity as a boy, it appears there might have been some friction between the two after his passionate conversion as a young man. The mother battles a form of gluttony that keeps her occupied with a strict diet and inevitably creates division between her family and friends.

### **THE ENEMY (God)**

God is characterized as an ever—present, powerful being capable of loving “human vermin”—something Screwtape

cannot understand. God is portrayed as participating in a spiritual battle with the Devil for the souls of men. God is distinguished by actually caring for and responding to their thoughts, needs, and concerns. However, God has left humans with the ability to choose which is where Screwtape and other demons get their foothold.

### **OUR FATHER BELOW (The Devil)**

The Devil, worshiped by Screwtape and other demons, is unable to understand God's love for his creation. He claims to have left Heaven on his own accord and that all other stories are just rumors. He desires to damn as many souls to Hell as possible by corrupting human nature. There is no love in his dominion of Hell, even among fellow demons, but rather a competitive nature of eat or be eaten.

### **SLUBGOB (The Head of the Training College )**

Slubgob is the principal of the Training College for Young Tempters. Screwtape portrays him initially as inept—churning out incompetent young demons, but later he treats him very graciously at an annual dinner.

### **GLUBOSE (The demon in charge of the patient's mother)**

Glubose, possibly a combination of "Gluttony" and "Obese", is the demon in charge of the patient's mother. Although rarely mentioned, his job is to busy himself causing discord between her and her son as well as making her constant dietary restrictions a problem with her family and friends.

### **SLUMTRIMPET (The demon in charge of the patient's fiancé)**

Slumtrimpet is a young female devil in charge of the patient's fiancé. She has very little success tempting the young woman into any kind of serious sin.

## Screwtape Letters - Week 1

### Letter 1 - Reason and Reality

*In this letter, we learn that Wormwood has been making sure that his patient spends plenty of time with his materialistic friends.*

*Wormwood believes that by using reason and argument he can keep the man from belief in God. Screwtape does not disagree that it is good to influence the man's thoughts, by he reminds Wormwood that his main job is to keep the patient from thinking too deeply about any spiritual matter. Instead he should use ordinary everyday distraction to mislead the man.*

1. Instead of making the patient think of materialism as \_\_\_\_\_, Wormwood should make him think of it as:
2. What's the trouble with awakening "the patient's reason?"
3. What "abominable advantage" does the Enemy have?
4. How did Screwtape once lead a patient away from a dangerous train of thought?

### Letter 2 - Distracting the Christian Mind

*Screwtape begins this letter by rebuking Wormwood for letting his patient escape him and become a Christian. However, not all is lost. If he can cause the man to be disillusioned with the church by highlighting the strange habits and hypocrisies of its members*

*Wormwood still might succeed. Screwtape tells Wormwood to attack the man's spiritual immaturity in an effort to win him back.*

1. What "Church" does Screwtape mean?
2. What are some "ideals" that can disappoint?
3. What happens after the "initial dryness?"

### Letter 3 - Relationships

*In this third letter, Screwtape suggests that Wormwood focus on the patient's relationship with his mother. By cooperating with Glubose, the demon who is working on the mother, Screwtape imparts secrets on how to slowly deteriorate the relationship.*

1. Why would Screwtape want to focus on spiritual matters vs physical ones?
2. It's not the words that matter, it's the
3. What "elder brother" does Screwtape refer to?

#### Letter 4 - Sincere Prayer

*Screwtape is insulted at Wormwood shifting blame and directly talks about prayer. More precisely how to thwart genuine prayer.*

1. The first advice is to move prayer away from formal prayers to
2. What don't we see according to Screwtape?
3. Why doesn't "real nakedness of soul" happen often?

#### Letter 5 - War

*Screwtape chides Wormwood for his naive excitement for the "new" war (World War II). It can be entertaining, but it can also drive masses of people to God.*

1. What are the two possible reactions to war offered to do the real work necessary?
2. What refreshment is provided to the toiling demons?
3. What "best weapon" is lost during war? Why?

#### Letter 6 - Focus

*Military service seems inevitable so Wormwood should divert attention away from God and the good his patient should do to fears about what might happen to him.*

1. Why is it easier to hate those who are close and be charitable to those who are far away
2. There is going to be benevolence and malice in the patient. What does Screwtape suggest Wormwood do with it?
3. How is this similar to his advice in letter 2 concerning the patient's relationship with his mother?

## Screwtape Letters - Week 2

### Letter 7 - Extremism

*When asked about revealing himself to his patient, Screwtape reminds Wormwood of the policy to keep humans ignorant of their existence. Also it matters not if the patient is pushed to pacifism or patriotism only so long as he doesn't think about God or others.*

What is the “cruel dilemma” for Screwtape?

What is the suggestion to squash suspicion of demon existence?

What has the church had to watch out for since the days of Paul and Apollos?

What matters most in pursuing a “worldly end”?

### Letter 8 - The Rule of Undulation

Screwtape explains the law of Undulation, The Enemies master plan for humans, contrast them the plan of Our Father Below

What is the law of Undulation?

What does the Enemy use more, troughs or peaks?

Why does the enemy withdraw His hand?

### Letter 9 - Pleasures

*Screwtape explains how to exploit the spiritually dry period with sensual pleasures and then attack the faith.*

What is the basic principle of exploiting the dry period?

What is the source of pleasures?

What are two other possible uses of the dry period?

## Letter 10 - Bad Friends

*Screwtape approves the efforts to encourage a spiritually harmful relationship, and advises Wormwood to use it to his advantage by encouraging a double life*

What do we mean by “the world” when we talk about it as a source of temptation? “The Devil, the world and our own sinful nature?”

How can the patient’s vanity be exploited?

What is the best if he spends more time with the new couple?

## Letter 11 - Laughter

*Screwtape loves the new sophisticated friends because they are consistent scoffers and worldings, but also warns Wormwood about laughter.*

What are the four categories that Screwtape divides human laughter into?

What doesn’t he like about the laughter of Joy?

Why is flippancy the best?

## Letter - Nothing

*Screwtape expresses concern about the pace of the patients drifting away. The safest path to Hell is the gentle slope without milestones or signposts.*

What is the danger if the patient becomes too aware of the drift away from the sun?

What effect does a dim uneasiness have?

How does Jesus warning to the church in Laodicea play into this letter? “I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot!” Rev. 2:15



## Screwtape Letters - Week 3

### Letter 13 - Personal Pleasure

*The patient awakens from his spiritual drift by experiencing real, simple pleasures. Wormwood needs to keep him from acting on his new feelings*

What were the two real, positive pleasures Wormwood allowed to happen?

What is a sort of first-line-of-defense that the Enemy has given against some subtle modes of attack?

What does the last advice mean, “the more often he feels without acting, the less he will be able ever to act”

### Letter 14 - Humility

*The best answer to genuine humility is to make the patient proud of his new-found humility and make the actual virtue of humility worthless.*

What has changed in the patient that is “most alarming” to Screwtape?

What is the best antidote to humility?

How is Wormwood to redefine true humility?

What does Screwtape indicate is the Enemy’s strategy?

What interesting comment concerning sin does Screwtape make at the end?

### Letter 15 - Past, Present, Future, and Eternity

*Get the patient to focus on the past (which is gone) or the future with exaggerated fears, anything but the present.*

Why should Wormwood get the patient to focus on the future?

To serve Screwtape’s plan what should be the focus of the future?

How does the Enemy want us thinking of the future?

## Letter 16 - Churches

*Church hopping should be encouraged, so make sure the patient becomes critical and dissatisfied with his present church.*

What are two reasons to encourage church shopping?

What are the “strengths” of two other possible churches for the patient to attend?

What does Paul teach about food and other unessentials?

## Letter 17 - Gluttony

*Gluttony isn't only about the quantity of food, but also by being controlled by what one eats and inconvenient demands on others.*

What reverse gluttony practice has taken hold?

If quantities don't matter, then what does?

It wasn't that in the past the servants got it right, but rather that in the past....

## Letter 18 - Love and Marriage

*Screwtape waxes elegant on the different perspectives of God and Satan on the designs for sexual unions.*

What have the poets encouraged to help with unchastity?

What is an image of the triunity of God?

What does the Enemy endue mere copulation with?

What are two advantages to “being in love” as the highest reason for marriage?

## Screwtape Letters - Week 4

### Letter 19 - Using Love

*Screwtape has spoken heresy by referencing the love of God for his creatures. He also admits that marriage can be useful even though it is the Enemy's invention.*

What does Screwtape say the real issue between "Our Father's" quarrel with the "Enemy"?

What is the only thing that matters to Screwtape regarding love, patriotism, et al.?

What are two different uses for love?

### Letter 20 - Sexual Taste

*Wormwood should attack chastity and capitalized on the work of the lower demons who manipulate the ideal woman through the media. Failing all direct the patient to look for the wrong woman to marry*

What is the point of the "lowerachy" manipulating the image of the ideal woman?

What is the ultimate goal of the "boyish" trend?

What is the difference between the terrestrial and infernal Venus?

### Letter 21 - Entitlement

*Make the patient believe that his time is his own, and when unexpected demands encroach on his time, he has the right to become angry, exasperated, and impatient.*

What should Wormwood "zealously guard" in his patient's mind?

What is the truth of the matter concerning time?

What sounds equally funny Heaven and Hell? In what word does the joke lie?

How would the Enemy have us use word "mine"?

## Letter 22 - The Christian Life

*Troubles are brewing between Screwtape and Wormwood. Now the patient is in love with a Christian woman.*

What is the horrific disgust about the Christian woman?

What variety of accusations does Screwtape make concerning the Enemy?

What happens when people encounter this woman's family?

What does our Father below seek to fill the universe with?

## Letter 23 - The Historical Jesus

*If you cant remove spirituality then corrupt it - politics and religion can create disagreements and confusion.*

Where lies the best point of attack to corrupt the patient's spirituality?

What are the four objectives of putting forward a "historical Jesus"?

What's the point of treating Christianity as a means to something?

## Letter 24 - Ignorance and Arrogance

*Back to working against that true Christian virtue of humility.*

What is the slight vice of the woman?

Why does this woman's family and friends extend a warm welcome to the patient?

What should Wormwood encourage in the patient?

## Screwtape Letters - Week 5

### Letter 25 - The Same Old Thing

*Wormwood should increase the patient's natural desire for change to make him restless always searching for something new and exciting.*

What does Screwtape say the Enemy has balanced a love of change with? Example?

How can this love of change be corrupted?

What are some ways this demand is valuable?

### Letter 26 - Unselfishness

*Wormwood should use the enchanting early days to sow seeds of unselfishness that can hopefully cause marital discord later on.*

What is the difference between "Charity" and "Unselfishness"?

What is the difference between the sexes concerning unselfishness?

How can "unselfishness" wreak havoc and create strife?

### Letter 27 - Answers

*Wormwood is to corrupt the prayer life of the patient by making him question how the Enemy could incorporate everyone's prayers into the running of creation.*

What is the demonstration that Wormwood has failed?

What is the "heads I win - tails you lose" argument?

What is the real problem of petitionary prayers?

What is the historical point of view?

### Letter 28 - Perseverance

*Failures have been mounting and now Screwtape has to remind Wormwood that he should endeavor to keep his patient alive to corrupt him later in life.*

What should Wormwood's chief aim be the same as the patient's lover and mother? Why?

What is the temptation of middle age?

Failing an intellectual attack on the patient's faith, what is another route of attack?

What is the temptation of prosperity?

What are two ways "real" can be used?

### Letter 29 - Cowardice

*Here we revisit fear and how to bring about shame through cowardice.*

What are some of the examples of using "real" for destructive purposes?

What should Wormwood encourage in the patient?

What is one vice that is still a vice?

### Letter 31 - The Other Side

*The view of death and life from Screwtape and Wormwood's perspective.*

What is the dilemma created by this vice?

What is the great triumph of cowardice?

In the explanation to the Sixth Petition, "lead us not into temptation" what do we want God to guard and protect us from?

### Letter 30 - Fatigue

*Wormwood is to work the fatigue of war to his favor and play with reality.*

What does Screwtape say is the best way to use fatigue?