

THE SCREWTAPE LETTERS STUDY GUIDE FOR TEENS

**A Bible Study for Teenagers on the
C.S. Lewis Book the Screwtape Letters**



By Alan Vermilye

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,
The Screwtape Letters

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A Bible Study for Teenagers
on the C.S. Lewis Book
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Introduction

What are your thoughts on the spiritual world? My guess is that it has something to do with ghosts, who were once people, trying to find their eternal rest. Or, how about demons who have infiltrated someone's body causing all kinds of death and destruction. Maybe, it's cartoonish angels with wings flying around in the clouds with harps.

At least that was my view on the spiritual world when I was a teen. My opinions, probably like yours, were formed entirely by movies, television and books. Why do we think this way? Mostly because of the media that we consume, but also because the church has done a poor job educating us on what lies beyond the worldly realm that we live in.

Which is so ironic, since the Bible is fairly clear on the subject. In the Bible, you find stories of angelic beings created by God to serve His creation. They intervene in human affairs and Scripture even says that at various times in our life we might be entertaining angels unaware. There are also stories of demon possession and actual battles between demons and angels.

So, why is it so hard for Christians to believe that God often interacts with the human race through his angels while Satan does so through his demons? The problem is that we cannot see the spiritual world so we assume it does not exist. Regardless of whether we can see it or not, there has been a

war going on in the spiritual realm since the beginning of time for the hearts of God’s most prized possession—us.

Ok, even if I buy into that, what does it have to do with me today? First, you need to have an awareness that the spiritual realm does exist. Secondly, you need to understand that there are demons looking to trip you up. Does that mean you can blame every bad thing on Satan and his minions? “The devil made me do it” argument does not always hold water. I have found that we do a pretty good job of screwing up all on our own.

But, Satan’s war strategy does involve pulling you away from God and making you more like him and less like Jesus. It generally does not happen overnight but rather slowly over time.

C.S. Lewis understood this truth. You might be more familiar with his children’s novel series later made into movies, *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Lewis wrote many other books including the book you’re about to study, *The Screwtape Letters*.

I hope you enjoy the book and the study. It can be a bit challenging at times, but hang in there, take your time, write notes in your book and in this study, and participate in a group discussion with others your age with an adult leader.

I believe at the end of reading the book and completing the study you will have a good appreciation for the spiritual world and a better understanding of why it matters in your life.

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)

Glucose, 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.

Course Notes and Study Format



HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

The Screwtape Letters consists of thirty-one letters and the additional *Screwtape Proposes a Toast*.

Each week you will read three letters, which are approximately 5 pages each. Each letter is short but not easily digested, so allow time to ponder each letter thoroughly. As you read, make notes in your book and underline or highlight sections that interest you. There are five questions for each Letter designed to help you understand better what you have read. As you work through each session, make note of any other questions you have in the Notes section at the end of each weekly session. The answers to each question can be found at www.ScrewtapeLettersStudyGuide.com/teen. However, do not cheat yourself. Work through each session prior to viewing the answers.

GROUP FORMAT

For group formats, the study works well over 11 consecutive weeks. The first week is an introduction week to hand out study guides (if purchased by the church), read through the introduction and character sketches, and set a plan and schedule for the remaining 10 weeks.

Letter 1: Reason and Reality

The trouble about argument is that it moves the whole struggle onto the Enemy's own ground. - Screwtape

1. Use your imagination and describe Screwtape and Wormwood. Take into account their appearance, personalities, and demeanor. Who would you rather have a conversation with and why?

2. **Screwtape's Game Plan** – Which action of Screwtape below do you think would be most effective in keeping teens from knowing Christ today? Why?

- a) Convincing teens that “real life” is just like their favorite reality show.
- b) Convincing teens that they are immortal and will never die.
- c) Replacing “right” or “wrong” with “what’s trending”.
- d) Acting without considering any consequences.
- e) Distracting teens with media and other forms of technology.

3. True or false. Satan wants you focused only on spiritual matters not non-essential matters.

4. Have you ever known someone who refused to come to church because of their disappointment with another Christian or the church? How does that change the way you talk to them about church?

5. **Bible Study Question** - Read Luke 10:39-42. What ordinary, everyday distractions was Martha concerned with? Who did it make her resent? What did she miss out on?

Letter 2: Distracting the Christian Mind



The Enemy allows this disappointment to occur on the threshold of every human endeavour. – Screwtape

1. Even though the patient has become a Christian, Screwtape believes Wormwood can convince his patient to come back to the dark side by using what?

2. **Screwtape's Game Plan** – If Screwtape went to work on your friends, which method below might be the most effective in getting them disappointed with the church? How would you defend the church against any of these accusations?

- a) Boring sermons
- b) Dullness of the music
- c) Hypocrisy of other Christian teens
- d) Self-righteous attitudes of other Christians
- e) Youth leaders that do not understand teen struggles

3. Have you ever been disappointed in the church as a whole or with certain church members? How did you handle it?

4. Screwtape wants Wormwood to keep his patient focused on the failures of other Christians while ignoring his own problems. What is it about your own conduct and character that you would prefer to ignore?

5. **Bible Study Question** - Read Galatians 6:7-10. What does Paul use as motivation to keep pressing on when tempted to give up at doing what is right? How might you apply this to your life now?