

The Screwtape Letters: A Book Review

Wouldn't it be an incredible find if you looked down on the ground and there was Satan's playbook? What if you picked it up, looked inside and saw what kind of luring temptations he had in store for you this week, what slow series of events this ultimate enemy was going to try to use against you to weaken you one little step at a time- how he was going to twist your strengths into vices. What if you could eaves drop on his diabolical conversations regarding just how he was planning to tear down what you have worked so long to build in your relationship with your children, by planting subtle misunderstandings and miscommunications he can use against you? Such a find would surely give you an advantage. With your eyes wide open you would be able to see him taking opportunities right and left. With this awareness, you'd be better able to cut him off at the pass, and ultimately, to conquer.

In 1942 brilliant English author CS Lewis, wrote *The Screwtape Letters*, a book that cannot help but change the way you view your adversary. In this fictional story, Screwtape, an experienced tempter, writes a series of thirty-one short letters to his nephew Wormwood, who is a novice in securing damnation for the soul, or "patient", assigned to him. His Uncle Screwtape writes these letters to "enlighten" him in all the best "tools of the trade". No work of fiction will sober your spirit in the battle for your salvation, and the salvation of those within your sphere of influence, than this little paperback. What are the best ways to undermine the faith of those who want to draw near to God? How can a skilled tempter use the qualities in human nature and bend them toward sin? Wormwood has all the answers. Do these strategies sound familiar?

- "Your patient must demand that all his own utterances are to be taken at their face value and judged simply on the actual words, while at the same time judging all his mother's utterances with the fullest and most over-sensitive interpretation of the tone and the context and the suspected intention. . . 'I simply ask her what time dinner will be and she flies into a temper.'" (Chapter 3)
- Not meditating in prayer upon the "completely real, external, invisible Presence, there with him in the room" and the "glorious luminosity" of God, or His caring eyes upon us, but instead picturing Him in a "composite object" such as an image on a wall-mounted crucifix. (Chapter 4)
- Being more concerned about "what is going to happen to us" instead of how well we will respond. (Chapter 6)
- Directing malice toward our immediate neighbors, while thrusting our benevolence out to the remotest circumference, so the malice becomes wholly real, and the benevolence largely imaginary. (Chapter 6)
- Thinking we are virtuous, when our virtues have not made it past fantasy and into our will and habits. "All sorts of virtues painted in the fantasy or approved by the intellect or even, in some measure, loved and admired, will not keep a man from our father's house (hell)" (Chapter 6)
- "Postponing acknowledgment" that the false ideas of our friends, whose company we enjoy most, are lethal. (Chapter 10)
- Turning into the thing we were pretending to be. (Chapter 10)
- Becoming a "different man" in each of the circles we frequent, and then admiring our own ability to be "adaptable" or "balanced" "complete" or (proudly) "complex"(although what we are really being is a treacherous hypocrite.) (Chapter 10)
- Regarding our small steps away from God to be viewed as trivial and easily revocable. (Chapter 12)
- Retaining externally the habits of a Christian life while in our hearts slowly being carried out of the Lord's orbit, heading right away from the sun on a line which will carry us into the cold and dark of utmost space, by simply "a few new friends and amusements". (Chapter 12)
- Allowing the cumulative effect of "small sins" to edge us away from the Light. . . "Indeed the safest road to hell is the gradual one—the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts." (Chapter 12)

- Making confident resolutions and lavish promises of perpetual virtue, instead of hope for the daily and hourly pittance to meet the daily and hourly temptation. (Chapter 14)
- Becoming a critic where God wants me to be a pupil, yet not being critical of what is false (Chapter 16)
- “That marriage can, and ought to, render . . . excitement permanent; and that a marriage which does not do so is no longer binding. (Chapter 18)
- Marrying someone who is a heathen, a fool, or a wanton (immoral) because I’m “in love” and therefore will not suffer any consequences. (Chapter 18)
- Thinking God belongs to me, instead of me belonging to God, thus seeing Him as “The God on whom I have a claim for my distinguished services. . .” (Chapter 21)
- Feeling a social pride or inward trumping of self-congratulation regarding being a Christian, rather than a humble gratitude. (Chapter 24)
- Overvaluing “experience” as a source of maturity, when it can instead merely be “. . . the mother of illusion.” (Chapter 28)
- Being proud of one’s vice. (Chapter 29)
- Depending upon one’s own moral resources “to fall back on”, and not those the Lord supplies. (Chapter 30)
- Having a pre-calculated amount of time one is expected to have to wait for relief, so as to despair when hope is delayed. (Chapter 30)

Written on a college level, *The Screwtape Letters* is not the easiest book you’ll ever read; but I know many bright teenagers who rave about the book. Occasionally, I found myself looking up words in the dictionary, and needing to read most paragraphs more than once. It is to be expected that not every sentence is going to be entirely understandable; after all, the feeling is that you are reading someone else’s mail. You may find it beneficial, as I did, to highlight each “scheme” and make a list of the strategies in your notes. It’s a deep book, yet it is a brief book. This classic is an excellent choice for small groups of older teens and up, and can easily be used alongside scriptures on the topic of standing firm against temptation. An Internet search will produce all kinds of options with regard to discussion questions to supplement such a class. Discover for yourself the value of reading this great book.

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