

The Screwtape Letters by C.S. Lewis

Discussion Questions

Preface

1. According to the author, what are the 2 mistakes mankind can make regarding the devil? 1) Believing he does not exist 2) Having an unhealthy interest in him

Letter 1

1. Who is Wormwood (WW)? A novice devil, Screwtape's nephew
2. Who is Screwtape? A wise old devil
3. Who is the patient? The devil's charge; it is that devil's responsibility to bring the patient to Hell
4. Who is the Enemy? God
5. Who is Our Father Below? Satan
6. What did Screwtape (ST) say was not the way to "win over" the patient? By argument. Why? Because then he would invoke reason and that would start him down the path of thinking about God
7. What did ST suggest works better? Distracting him. Getting him to react to immediate sensory experiences.
8. Do you agree or disagree with ST's assessment?
9. What example did ST use to support his position? An atheist was reading a book. He started to question faith. God tried to intervene by helping him to think and question. ST distracted him by thinking about lunch and the newsboy. This was enough to influence the patient.

Letter 2

1. What is ST upset about in this letter? That WW's patient has become a Christian.
2. According to ST, why do most "converts" revert? Bad habits, The Church (poorly educated Christians and clergy, annoying habits of fellow Christians, disappointments or anti-climax from expectations), and they have no real humility yet
3. If a Christian successfully makes it through this initial dryness, why do the devils have to work harder? The patient becomes less dependant on emotion and harder to tempt.

Letter 3

1. Who is Glubose? The devil in charge of the patient's mother
2. How does ST propose WW focus on the patient's prayers for his mom? Only on her spiritual needs, not physical needs. Why? It will make him see his mother as a different person because he is removing all of her physical ailments
3. How else did he propose using their relationship to do harm? Concentrate on their annoying habits, but don't let them suspect that they have annoying habits themselves. Create a double-standard. Encourage them to judge the other, but convince them they are innocent of the behavior themselves
4. What charge did he give to WW at the end of the letter? Figure out the mother's religious position. Why? It may be used to irritate her further if she has none

Letter 4

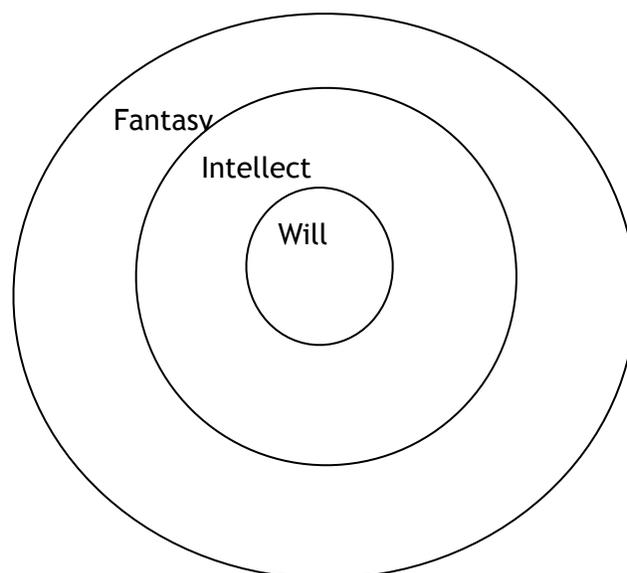
1. In the first paragraph, ST scolds WW for his advice regarding prayer. What does this reveal about how the devil works? He only seeks to blame others, especially when his own “advice” goes awry.
2. What advice did he give to WW regarding prayer? Don’t let the patient engage in deep prayer, persuade him that bodily position makes no difference, keep his prayers focused on the patient, not on God (i.e. no praise and thanksgiving only petition), try to produce the desired feelings of the prayers, keep focused on some composite object.
3. What “incalculable situation” may arise regarding prayer? He may trust himself completely to God.

Letter 5

1. What was WW excited about? WWI had broken out.
2. According to ST, what is the reward for all of a devil’s labors? The anguish and bewilderment of a human soul.
3. Why is war good for the devils? It is entertaining, it causes immediate fear and suffering of humans, which is pleasing refreshment.
4. Why is war bad for the devils? People realize they may die and prepare accordingly for it.
5. What is one of the devil’s best weapons? Contented worldliness

Letter 6

1. What was ST delighted about? That the Patient could be called up for military service but was not certain. Why? Because the suspense will create anxiety and fear
2. How should WW use that fear to his advantage? Focus not on what is feared, but fear itself, make sure he doesn’t see his suffering as a cross, only a fear.
3. What visual did ST give WW to think about his Patient? Where should all virtue be kept? In the fantasy world.



Letter 7

1. **What is the policy for devils to reveal themselves to their patients?** They must conceal themselves.
2. **What is to be encouraged?** All extremes except extreme devotion to God
3. **What are the devils trying to produce within the church?** Small membership, self-righteousness, factions within
4. **What did ST advise regarding convincing the Patient of Patriotism or Pacifism?** Pacifism. Make it part of his religion
5. **How can WW “win” his man?** By making the world an end and faith a means (e.g. meetings, pamphlets, policies, movements, causes and crusades, matter more to him than prayers, sacraments, and charity)

Letter 8

1. **What is undulation?** Repeated return to a level from which they repeatedly fall back, a series of troughs and peaks
2. **According to ST, what does God rely on more...troughs or peaks?** Troughs. **Why?** Because during these times we try to conform our will to God’s will. The prayers offered in the state of dryness please him best
3. **What does the devil want with regard to our will?** To absorb it. **What does God want?** For us to freely conform our will to His

Letter 9

1. **What does ST advise during the troughs?** To exploit the Patient.
2. **What does ST advise regarding pleasures of this world?** Encourage them in all extremes (e.g. extreme drinking)
3. **How else does ST recommend exploiting the troughs?** Make the patient think his faith should have lasted forever and as such, the trough will last forever too. Emphasize that religion is a phase.
4. **What should we do when we find ourselves in a spiritual trough?**

Letter 10

1. **Why were the patient’s new friends desirable according to ST?** They were rich, smart, superficially intellectual and brightly skeptical about everything in the world (i.e. worldly).
2. **In what way could WW use this couple to his benefit?** By encouraging the Patient to pretend to be someone he is not (like them). By getting him to enjoy the worldly things this couple can provide.
3. **How do the devils use the word “Puritanism” to their benefit?** By adding connotations to the word associated with extreme temperance, chastity and sobriety of life.
4. **What did ST want WW to do regarding the friendship?** Get the patient to lead a parallel-life - actually be a different man in each of the circles he frequents
5. **How could WW further bring about evil in the encouraging of this friendship?** Induce the patient to spend more \$\$, neglect his work and mother, which will in turn aggravate their relationship.
6. **Do you see how tangled the web that the devil can weave in such an innocent thing as a friendship with people who are unfaithful followers of Christ?**

7. What should you look for or avoid in your own friends?

Letter 11

1. Describe how things are progressing with the patient's worldly friends. They have introduced him to others in their circle who are quietly and comfortably progressing towards Hell.
2. How does ST divide the causes of human laughter? Joy, Fun, the Joke Proper, and Flippancy
3. Which one does the devil no good? Joy
4. Which one is very little use but can sometimes be used as a distraction? Fun
5. How can jokes be used best? To destroy shame. Give an example. Cowardice is shameful, but cowardice boasted of with humorous exaggerations and grotesque gestures can be passed off as funny. How do you think this can hurt a person? They don't develop good virtues of courage if they are always trying to be funny
6. Which cause of human laughter is the best as far as the devil is concerned? Flippancy. Why? Everything serious can be made to look ridiculous.

Letter 12

1. The patient is heading away from God. How does ST recommend furthering this process? Slowly, small distractions. He wants him to remain a churchgoer so that he thinks he is still a Christian.
2. After WW is able to separate the Patient more from God, what becomes easier for the devils? Distractions. They don't have to work as hard at providing temptations
3. According to ST, what is the safest road to hell? The gradual one. So should devils strive for extreme wickedness? No. Small sins will do the trick.

Letter 13

1. What image does ST use to describe the protection around the Patient? An asphyxiating cloud.
2. What two mistakes did WW make? Allowed the patient to read a book he truly enjoyed and take a walk alone through the country he really likes. Why was this a mistake? It allowed the patient to have real pleasure, detach himself, and see things for what they truly are.
3. What should WW try to avoid having the patient do? Enjoying anything fully in the world without caring what others think. It would be better to encourage them to enjoy the "best" people, the "right" food, the important "books."

Letter 14

1. What was ST most alarmed about? The patient was no longer making lavish promises of virtue. Rather he was just trying to hope for strength hourly/daily against temptation. What had changed in his personality? He was becoming more humble.
2. What advice did ST have for that? Encourage pride at his own humility.
3. What is God's hope with Humility? To turn the man's attention away from self and to Him and our neighbors.
4. Give an example of false humility? Pretty women trying to believe that they are ugly

5. **What kind of humility should we be striving for?** To see not only the merit and beauty in our own talents but more importantly to recognize all creatures as glorious and excellent things.

Letter 15

1. **What are the two things God wants us to be concerned with?** Being with God in eternity or thinking about the present (i.e. present voice of conscience, bearing the present cross, receiving the present grace, giving thanks for the present pleasure)
2. **What should the devils do to get us away from these two states?** Tempt us to live in the past or better yet make us live in the future in order to inflame hope and fear.

Letter 16

1. **What advice did ST have involving the patient going to the same church?** Get him to church shop. **Why?** Unity is bad for the devils. Shopping for a church makes one a critic where the Enemy wants him to be a pupil.
2. **At the first church ST describes, what are the conditions?** The Vicar has watered down the faith, he sticks to a set of psalms and lessons.
3. **Second church?** The vicar has a huge range of opinions and there is a streak of dishonesty in him
4. **What action should this letter spur us to in regards to our priests and seminarians?** PRAY, PRAY, PRAY for their holiness!

Letter 17

1. **Describe the kind of gluttony ST is talking about here?** Overly particular, getting what one wants no matter how troublesome it is to others. Insatiable demand for the exact.
2. **How are men best turned into gluttons?** Vanity, looking for and finding the best then insisting upon it.

Letter 18

1. **What does God demand from us in terms of chastity?** Complete abstinence or unmitigated monogamy. Purity in all things.

Letter 19

1. **What “heresy” did ST admit to?** That God loves humans. **Why is this a heresy?** Because ST believes that God’s talk of love must be a disguise for something else. He believes no one can really love.
2. **Describe ST’s character.** He makes uncomplimentary reference to Slubgob. He claims WW can trust him to look after his interests. He is two-faced.
3. **What did ST recommend WW do in regards to love?** Get the patient to marry someone who is intensely difficult.

Letter 20

1. **Over the years, what have the devils done regarding physical appearance and the opposite sex?** Make certain secondary characteristics disagreeable to nearly all females (e.g. Beards). For men to get them to find women whose bodies are thin, thus discouraging women from wanting to bear children

2. **What two kinds of women does ST want WW to encourage his patient to marry?** 1) One that was already married 2) One that he would desire obsessively

Letter 21

1. **What throws the patient into a passion?** When time that he thought was going to be his own is taken away from him.
2. **How should WW further exploit this?** By making him feel like “My time is my own”
3. **In what ways does ST think ownership should be encouraged?** “own” their bodies, God, things (e.g. boots), people (e.g. wife)
4. **Who truly owns our souls, bodies, and time?** God
5. **Do you ever feel annoyed when your “free time” is cut short?**
6. **What should we strive for when our time gets interrupted or taken away?**
Compliance to God’s will

Letter 22

1. **What is ST upset about?** That the patient has fallen in love with a good Christian girl
2. **What is he scolding WW about?** That WW didn’t tell him about the girl.
3. **Based on ST’s description of the girl’s family, how would you describe them?** Strong Christians, not easily tempted by the devil, heaven-like, very loving and supportive
4. **What 2 things does ST detest?** Music and silence.
5. **What is Hell occupied with?** Noise. **Why?** It distracts people and them keeps from truly thinking about things.
6. **Think about this in regards to your own life. Do you allow for times of silence? Do you listen to good music that inspires and doesn’t further contribute to the “noise”?**
7. **What happens to ST?** He transforms into a centipede. **Why?** It is a punishment imposed by God for being such a worm.

Letter 23

1. **What is happening to the patient as a result of his girlfriend?** He is becoming a stronger Christian and a more intelligent Christian.
2. **What is WW to do?** Corrupt it. Distract men from who Jesus really is and what He did. Reduce Him to a mere teacher.
3. **What should WW try to get the Patient to avoid?** Do not allow Christianity to flow over into their political life. **Why?** The establishment of a just society would be a disaster.

Letter 24

1. **What is the character flaw in the Patient’s girlfriend?** Spiritual pride towards anyone who does not share her beliefs.
2. **Angels are very smart, consequently since the devils are fallen angels they are very smart as well and use this to exploit our weaknesses. Relate an event from this letter or elsewhere in the book to demonstrate this claim. The level of deception in finding this flaw in the girlfriend and exploiting it in the Patient.**

3. **How did ST propose WW use this flaw to exploit his own patient?** By imitating and exaggerating this defect in his girlfriend (who presents it much more subtly). It will then lead to spiritual pride of epic proportions.
4. **How does ST admonish WW at the end of the letter?** Don't fill your letters with information about the war. Stay focused on the patient.

Letter 25

1. **What is the horror of the Same Old Thing?** An endless source of heresies in religion, folly in counsel, infidelity in marriage, and inconsistency in friendship. There is no change in their life.
2. **How has God balanced the love of change?** By giving us a love of permanence as well. Rhythm is the key (e.g. the seasons, the Liturgical year, etc)
3. **How do devils exploit this?** By twisting it into a demand for novelty.

Letter 26

1. **What does ST use courtship for?** Sowing the seeds which will grow up into domestic hatred.
2. **What is the negative of the virtue of charity?** Unselfishness.
3. **What is the woman's view of unselfishness?** Taking trouble for others. The man's view? Not giving troubles to others.

Letter 27

1. **In what way has the Patient's prayers changed since he has fallen in love?** It has become mainly petitionary.
2. **How can the devils use this to further their cause?** If God does not answer the prayer they can prove that petitionary prayer doesn't work. If they prayer is answered, they are to stress the physical causes leading up to it (i.e. "it would have happened anyway)
3. **What is the benefit of reading old books?** Acquiring wisdom

Letter 28

1. **What does ST say they are trying to avoid?** The patient's death. **Why?** Because all of their efforts have so far failed and if he died tonight he would go to heaven
2. **What happens as people live longer according to ST?** Day to day drudgery makes it difficult to persevere in the faith. Man finds a place in the world and does not want to relinquish it.

Letter 29

1. **Since the Germans are going to bomb the patient's town, what three things does ST propose to influence?**
 - a. Cowardice - can make men feel shame and cause them to repent
 - b. Courage with consequent pride - devils can't produce any virtue
 - c. Hatred of the Germans - hatred is best combined with fear
2. **Which one does ST propose WW inflict upon the patient?** Cowardice

3. **Give an example of how the devils are trying to learn more and increase their stronghold.** The Research Department is trying to figure out how to produce any virtue.

Letter 30

1. How did the patient behave during the raid? He was courageous but without pride because he was fearful.
2. How can fatigue help the devils? It creates peevishness in us.

Letter 31

1. **Describe the affection ST has for WW.** At WW's failure, ST is angry and thinks WW is a pitiful fool. He loves him as a dainty morsel to grow fat on.
2. **What happened to the Patient?** He died as a result of the bombing
3. **Who is "Them"?** The good angels
4. **Aside from WW, who else does ST blame for the loss of this soul?** The Intelligence Department. **Why?** Because they can't figure out what God is up to.

Preface ST Proposes a Toast

1. **Do you relate at all to Lewis's description of extending ST letters, when he talks about the strain that writing it produced in him as you read the book?**

The Toast

1. **In ST's opinion, which souls are the best to feast on?** The really evil ones...Hitler, Henry VIII.
2. **What souls were finding their way into Hell?** Stupid ones who didn't do horrible evils, but lots of little things.
3. **Why is this happening?** Poorly formed consciences, bad habits that become principle, rejection of Grace.
4. **When did the devils see a turning point in the number of souls?** Latter half of the 19th century. **Why?** Because of democracy, "I'm as good as you." This leads to resentment of superiority and envy.
5. **How did this change in thinking effect people's individualism?** They wanted to be like everyone else.
6. **The devils try to dissuade us from classical music and literature. Why?** It may inspire us and make us different
7. **What advice does ST give to the devils for infiltrating the education system?** Disguise differences between pupils, make nearly everyone get good marks, for kids not wanting to learn math and science let them do art, don't hold any child back, all incentives to learn and penalties for not learning will vanish, make all education run by the state.
8. **What cause does ST make for us to study history?** Not to repeat the mistakes of the past.
9. **Which souls make the best wine?** That of the Pharisee and those "religious" who are anything but religious.

Final Questions

1. According to this book, the devils are constantly after us trying to tempt us and “win” our souls. What can we do to avoid this from happening? Frequent reception of the sacraments, choosing friends who challenge us to greater Faith, deep prayer, times of silence.
2. What temptations are you more aware of after reading this book?