

The Screwtape Letters
A Reading Group
January, 2023

Course Objectives:

1) *Become better readers.*

In a 2008 *Atlantic* article, Nicholas Carr asked the question, “Is Google Making Us Stupid?” His answer was a startling ‘yes,’ and one of the key reasons was that *digital* reading—scrolling, searching, scanning—has ruined not only our attention spans for sustained thought, but also some of our capacities for higher thought. The dopamine of the quick information fix ruins our appetite for harder, but more rewarding, reading. The situation could have been orchestrated by Screwtape himself, who praises the power of noise and distraction to ruin human souls. Therefore, a key goal in our modern age of distraction is to become better readers.

2) *Moral and Spiritual Formation*

In the fourth letter, Screwtape writes of God’s tactics, “...to human animals on their knees He pours out self-knowledge in a quite shameless fashion.” We are creatures being formed into the image of God, devilish tactics are arrayed against this process—most of them seeking to confuse, obscure, and misdirect.

3) *Learn Lewis’s Lessons*

Through the Screwtape Letters, Lewis draws from a series of ‘big ideas’ in his thinking—each of which points to some of his central theological convictions about the Christian life. I intend to focus on five of these big ideas, one each week of our course—they are:

- i) *Cosmology/Spiritual Warfare*; (An analysis of the Spiritual world and its tactics)
- ii) *Objectivism* (Lewis’s primary philosophical approach to the world);
- iii) *Romantic Theology* (a theological analysis of how love, rightly understood, draws us into relationship with God);
- iv) *Embodiment/The Animal Condition* (our unique, amphibian status in the world, especially as it relates to sex);
- v) *Virtue and Disinterested Love* (what does it mean to grow in virtue as a decision-making entity?).

Schedule:

January 20

Week 1: The Spiritual World and its Tactics
Introduction and Letters 1-6

January 27

Week 2: The Power of the Real (Objectivism)
Letters 7-13

February 3

Week 3: The Power of Love (Romantic Theology)

Letters 14-18

February 10

Week 4: Sex and Humour (Rational Animals)

Letters 19-24

February 17

Week 5: Disinterested Love, Virtue and Vice

Letters 25-31

“Screwtape Proposes a Toast” (Optional)

Tips for Reading:

1. Read with a pencil in hand, and don't be afraid to mark up the book. Underline things that interest you. Draw lines along the margins of things that you want to remember. Write words or notes in the margins that you think about while reading. The margins of the books are your invitation to engage with the material—so use them!

2. While you read, ask two questions in preparation for our group discussions:

Question 1: What spoke to me while reading this?

Question 2: What raised a question for me while reading this?

Weekly Time:

Small Group Discussion

Big Group Discussion

Talk on Designated Subject

Break

Small Group Discussion

Big Group Discussion