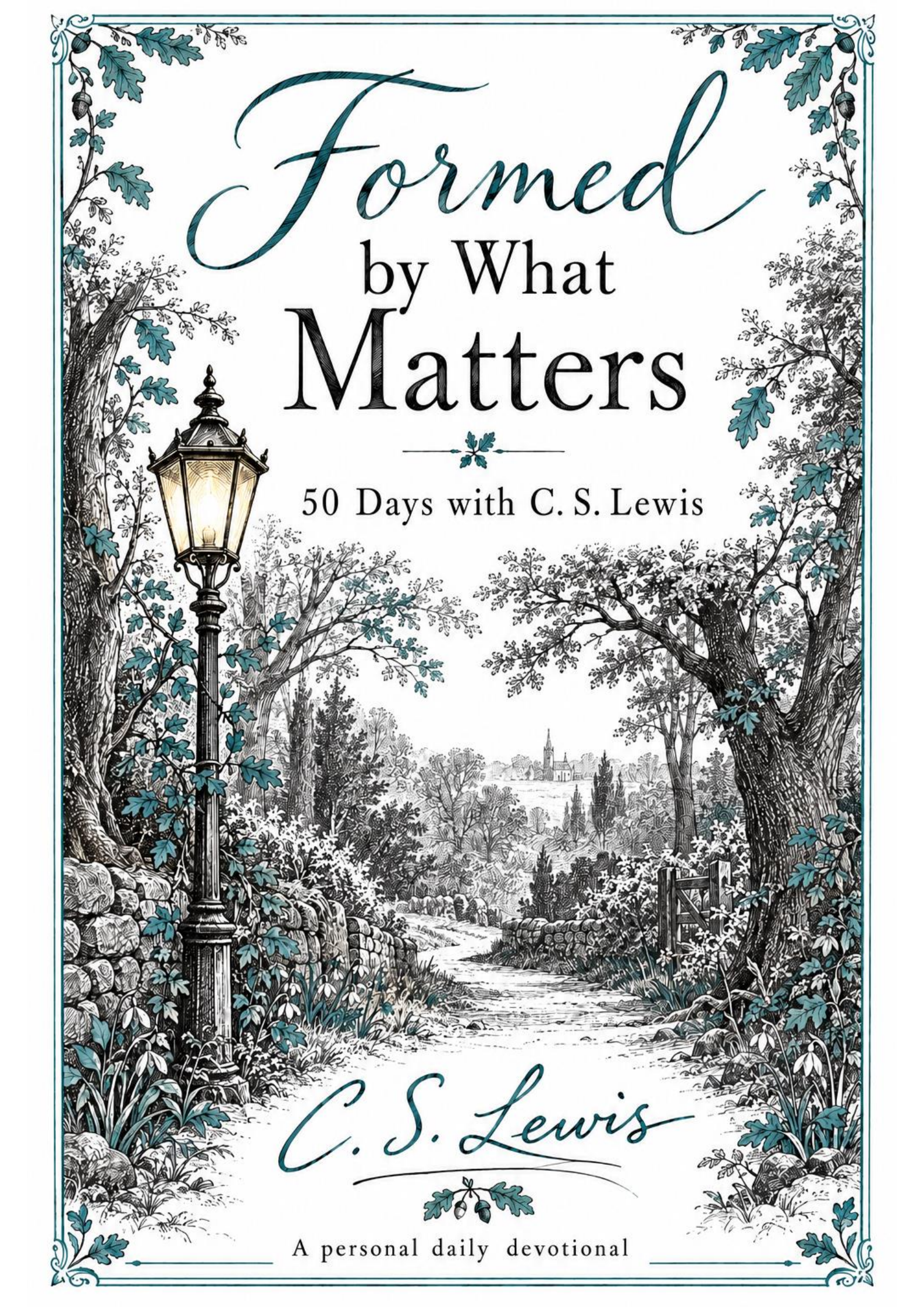




Formed by What Matters

50 Days with C. S. Lewis

C. S. Lewis

A personal daily devotional

How to use this booklet

Each day begins with a passage from C. S. Lewis, so you can follow his argument in his own words. A short explanation then connects his ideas with everyday life, faith and the development of character.

Read the passage, then THE LARGER IDEA, which explains its meaning. Use the two REFLECT questions for discussion or personal reflection. Each reading is short enough for a homegroup, pastoral care group or personal devotional time.

Suggested rhythm: READ → UNDERSTAND → REFLECT

The 10-week formation arc

- 01 TRUTH & REALITY
Learning to see clearly
- 02 CHOICES & FORMATION
Who are your choices making you?
- 03 PRIDE & HUMILITY
Moving beyond the need to be the centre
- 04 LOVE & OTHER PEOPLE
Learning to look beyond ourselves
- 05 PAIN, COURAGE & RESILIENCE
Faith when life hurts
- 06 FAITH, DOUBT & TRUST
Holding on when feelings change
- 07 HOPE, DESIRE & HEAVEN
Wanting something bigger
- 08 EDUCATION & THE FORMATION OF DESIRE
Training the head, heart and habits
- 09 SURRENDER & TRANSFORMATION
Christianity as more than self-improvement
- 10 BECOMING
The person God is forming

WEEK 01

Truth & Reality

Learning to see clearly



What might this week help you notice?



Progress sometimes means turning around

READ

Would you think I was joking if I said that you can put a clock back, and that if the clock is wrong it is often a very sensible thing to do? But I would rather get away from that whole idea of clocks. We all want progress. But progress means getting nearer to the place where you want to be. And if you have taken a wrong turning, then to go forward does not get you any nearer. If you are on the wrong road, progress means doing an about-turn and walking back to the right road; and in that case the man who turns back soonest is the most progressive man.

Source: Mere Christianity, Book I, Chapter 5: "We Have Cause to Be Uneasy"

THE LARGER IDEA

Lewis challenges the assumption that progress always means continuing in the same direction. If the direction is wrong, moving faster only takes us further from where we should be. Real progress may require admitting a mistake, changing our mind, apologising, or returning to something true that we abandoned. For teenagers, this matters because changing direction can feel like failure. Lewis reframes it as courage: the person willing to correct the course may actually be the one moving forward most honestly.

REFLECT

1. Where in life can people confuse “moving forward” with genuinely making progress?
2. Is there an area where changing direction, apologising or beginning again might actually be progress for you?

One thought to carry into today...



The arguments we have reveal what we believe

READ

Every one has heard people quarrelling. Sometimes it sounds funny and sometimes it sounds merely unpleasant; but however it sounds, I believe we can learn something very important from listening to the kind of things they say. They say things like this: ‘How’d you like it if anyone did the same to you?’—‘That’s my seat, I was there first’—‘Leave him alone, he isn’t doing you any harm’—‘Why should you shove in first?’—‘Give me a bit of your orange, I gave you a bit of mine’—‘Come on, you promised.’ People say things like that every day, educated people as well as uneducated, and children as well as grown-ups.

Source: Mere Christianity, Book I, Chapter 1: “The Law of Human Nature”

THE LARGER IDEA

Lewis begins his case for objective morality in an ordinary place: arguments. When we say “that isn’t fair”, “you promised”, or “how would you like it?”, we are not merely saying that we dislike what happened. We are appealing to a standard that we expect the other person to recognise. Lewis thinks our everyday disagreements reveal that we already live as though some things really are right or wrong. The challenge is that we often expect other people to follow standards that we ourselves struggle to keep.

REFLECT

1. What do the things people say during arguments reveal about their sense of right and wrong?
2. What standard do you most quickly expect other people to keep, and how well do you live by it yourself?

One thought to carry into today...

Science is powerful, but not every question is a scientific question



READ

And on this view it made the universe, partly for purposes we do not know, but partly, at any rate, in order to produce creatures like itself—I mean, like itself to the extent of having minds. Please do not think that one of these views was held a long time ago and that the other has gradually taken its place. Wherever there have been thinking men both views turn up. And note this too. You cannot find out which view is the right one by science in the ordinary sense. Science works by experiments. It watches how things behave.

Source: Mere Christianity, Book I, Chapter 4: “What Lies Behind the Law”

THE LARGER IDEA

Lewis is not attacking science. He is distinguishing between different kinds of questions. Science is extraordinarily good at investigating how the physical world behaves. But questions such as “Why is there a universe?”, “What is ultimately meaningful?”, or “What ought I to do?” are not answered simply by adding more measurements. Lewis wants us to avoid using one tool for every kind of problem. A mature thinker can value science deeply while also recognising philosophical, moral and theological questions that require other forms of reasoning.

REFLECT

1. What kinds of questions is science especially good at answering?
 2. What important questions about life cannot be answered by an experiment alone?
-
-

One thought to carry into today...

How do we recognise injustice?



READ

And for many years I simply refused to listen to the Christian answers to this question, because I kept on feeling ‘whatever you say, and however clever your arguments are, isn’t it much simpler and easier to say that the world was not made by any intelligent power? Aren’t all your arguments simply a complicated attempt to avoid the obvious?’ But then that threw me back into another difficulty. My argument against God was that the universe seemed so cruel and unjust. But how had I got this idea of just and unjust? A man does not call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line. What was I comparing this universe with when I called it unjust?

Source: Mere Christianity, Book II, Chapter 1: “The Rival Conceptions of God”

THE LARGER IDEA

Lewis reflects on his former argument against God: the world seemed too cruel and unjust for a good God to exist. He then noticed a problem. To call the world unjust, he needed some idea of what justice ought to be. The protest itself seemed to depend on a standard beyond personal preference. Lewis is not claiming that suffering is easy to explain. Instead, he asks where our deep conviction that some things should not happen comes from. Our outrage at evil may itself point toward a real moral standard.

REFLECT

1. Why does Lewis compare injustice with recognising a crooked line?
2. When you say something is genuinely unfair, what are you assuming about right and wrong?

One thought to carry into today...

Every road involves a choice



READ

The attempt is based on the belief that reality never presents us with an absolutely unavoidable "either-or"; that, granted skill and patience and (above all) time enough, some way of embracing both alternatives can always be found; that mere development or adjustment or refinement will somehow turn evil into good without our being called on for a final and total rejection of anything we should like to retain. This belief I take to be a disastrous error. You cannot take all luggage with you on all journeys; on one journey even your right hand and your right eye may be among the things you have to leave behind.

Source: The Great Divorce, Preface

THE LARGER IDEA

Lewis rejects the comforting idea that every path eventually reaches the same destination. Choices close some possibilities and open others. We cannot become every possible version of ourselves at once. Saying yes to honesty means saying no to some dishonest advantage. Saying yes to faithfulness may mean giving up an easier option. Formation therefore involves real decisions and real surrender. Lewis's image of a road repeatedly forking asks us to notice that the direction of our lives is being shaped by choices that may appear small at the time.

REFLECT

1. Why can't we take "all luggage" on every journey?
2. What is one choice you make regularly that is quietly setting a direction for your life?

One thought to carry into today...

WEEK 02

Choices & Formation

Who are your choices making you?



What might this week help you notice?

Your choices are making you



READ

People often think of Christian morality as a kind of bargain in which God says, ‘If you keep a lot of rules I’ll reward you, and if you don’t I’ll do the other thing.’ I do not think that is the best way of looking at it. I would much rather say that every time you make a choice you are turning the central part of you, the part of you that chooses, into something a little different from what it was before. And taking your life as a whole, with all your innumerable choices, all your life long you are slowly turning this central thing either into a heavenly creature or into a hellish creature: either into a creature that is in harmony with God, and with other creatures, and with itself, or else into one that is in a state of war and hatred with God, and with its fellowcreatures, and with itself.

Source: Mere Christianity, Book III, Chapter 4: “Morality and Psychoanalysis”

THE LARGER IDEA

Lewis says morality is about more than getting individual decisions right. Every decision leaves a mark on the chooser. Tell the truth repeatedly and truthfulness becomes more natural. Feed resentment repeatedly and resentment becomes easier to return to. This is character formation: actions become habits, and habits help shape who we are. That means even choices nobody else notices matter. The question is not only “What will happen if I do this?” but also “What kind of person am I practising becoming when I choose this?”

REFLECT

1. What does Lewis mean by the “central part” of a person?
2. Think of one repeated choice in your life. What kind of person is that choice training you to become?

One thought to carry into today...



Wisdom means thinking about where choices lead

READ

They are prudence, temperance, justice and fortitude. Prudence means practical common sense, taking the trouble to think out what you are doing and what is likely to come of it. Nowadays most people hardly think of Prudence as one of the ‘virtues’. In fact, because Christ said we could only get into His world by being like children, many Christians have the idea that, provided you are ‘good’, it does not matter being a fool. But that is a misunderstanding.

Source: Mere Christianity, Book III, Chapter 2: “The Cardinal Virtues”

THE LARGER IDEA

Lewis treats prudence—practical wisdom—as a genuine virtue. Good intentions are not enough if we never think carefully about consequences. Christian character involves learning to pause, understand a situation, seek advice and consider what an action is likely to produce. That does not mean becoming anxious about every decision. It means refusing to separate goodness from thoughtfulness. Sometimes the kindest, bravest or most faithful response is not the first reaction that comes into our head.

REFLECT

1. Why might Lewis describe practical common sense as a virtue rather than just a skill?
2. Where could slowing down and thinking ahead improve one of your decisions this week?

One thought to carry into today...



A good action is not yet the same as good character

READ

And Fortitude includes both kinds of courage—the kind that faces danger as well as the kind that ‘sticks it’ under pain. ‘Guts’ is perhaps the nearest modern English. You will notice, of course, that you cannot practise any of the other virtues very long without bringing this one into play. There is one further point about the virtues that ought to be noticed. There is a difference between doing some particular just or temperate action and being a just or temperate man. Someone who is not a good tennis player may now and then make a good shot.

Source: Mere Christianity, Book III, Chapter 2: “The Cardinal Virtues”

THE LARGER IDEA

Lewis uses the picture of a tennis player to explain character. Anyone can occasionally hit a good shot; a strong player has practised until good movement becomes reliable. In the same way, one courageous or generous act does not automatically make us courageous or generous. Virtue grows through repeated practice. This is encouraging because character is not fixed: it can be trained. It is also challenging because the person we become is shaped by ordinary repetition, not only by rare heroic moments.

REFLECT

1. What is the difference between doing one good action and becoming a person with that virtue?
2. What virtue would you like to become more “reliable” in, and what repeated practice could help?

One thought to carry into today...



Actions leave marks on the inner person

READ

Christian writers seem to be so very strict at one moment and so very free and easy at another. They talk about mere sins of thought as if they were immensely important: and then they talk about the most frightful murders and treacheries as if you had only got to repent and all would be forgiven. But I have come to see that they are right. What they are always thinking of is the mark which the action leaves on that tiny central self which no one sees in this life but which each of us will have to endure—or enjoy—for ever.

Source: Mere Christianity, Book III, Chapter 4: “Morality and Psychoanalysis”

THE LARGER IDEA

Lewis asks us to look beyond how impressive or disastrous an action appears from the outside. Two people may express the same anger in very different circumstances, but both may be strengthening the same inner habit. What matters is the mark a choice leaves on the self. This does not mean consequences are unimportant. It means character is also being formed beneath the surface. A private act of dishonesty can matter even if nobody is harmed immediately, because it can make dishonesty easier next time.

REFLECT

1. Why does Lewis think the inner “mark” of an action matters?
2. What choices are easy to dismiss as small even though they may be shaping your character?

One thought to carry into today...



Starting again is not the same as giving up

READ

It does not move towards unity but away from it and the creatures grow further apart as they increase in perfection. Good, as it ripens, becomes continually more different not only from evil but from other good. I do not think that all who choose wrong roads perish; but their rescue consists in being put back on the right road. A wrong sum can be put right: but only by going back till you find the error and working it afresh from that point, never by simply going on. Evil can be undone, but it cannot "develop" into good.

Source: The Great Divorce, Preface

THE LARGER IDEA

Lewis says that when a calculation has gone wrong, the answer is not to keep adding more numbers. You return to the error and work from there. He uses this as a picture of repentance. Time by itself does not turn wrong into right. Sometimes healing begins by naming where things went off course and choosing a different direction. That can involve apology, confession, repairing harm, or changing a habit. Going back to correct something may feel embarrassing, but Lewis describes it as the only way genuinely forward.

REFLECT

1. Why can simply “moving on” fail to repair something that has gone wrong?
2. Is there a mistake you could correct rather than hoping time will quietly erase it?

One thought to carry into today...

WEEK 03

Pride & Humility

Moving beyond the need to be the centre



What might this week help you notice?

Pride puts the self at the centre



READ

You may remember, when I was talking about sexual morality, I warned you that the centre of Christian morals did not lie there. Well, now, we have come to the centre. According to Christian teachers, the essential vice, the utmost evil, is Pride. Unchastity, anger, greed, drunkenness, and all that, are mere fleabites in comparison: it was through Pride that the devil became the devil: Pride leads to every other vice: it is the complete anti-God state of mind. Does this seem to you exaggerated? If so, think it over. I pointed out a moment ago that the more pride one had, the more one disliked pride in others.

Source: Mere Christianity, Book III, Chapter 8: "The Great Sin"

THE LARGER IDEA

Lewis regards pride as especially destructive because it changes the way we relate to God and other people. Pride does not simply mean feeling pleased about doing something well. It is the need to place ourselves above others, to be the one who matters most, or to resist dependence on God. Lewis believes many other problems grow from this self-centred posture. Pride makes correction harder, apology harder and gratitude harder because each requires us to admit that we are not self-sufficient.

REFLECT

1. Why does Lewis see pride as more serious than simply "showing off"?
2. Which is harder for you: being corrected, apologising, or giving someone else credit? What might that reveal?

One thought to carry into today...



Comparison can turn good things into competitions

READ

It is because I wanted to be the big noise at the party that I am so annoyed at someone else being the big noise. Two of a trade never agree. Now what you want to get clear is that Pride is essentially competitive—is competitive by its very nature—while the other vices are competitive only, so to speak, by accident. Pride gets no pleasure out of having something, only out of having more of it than the next man. We say that people are proud of being rich, or clever, or good-looking, but they are not.

Source: Mere Christianity, Book III, Chapter 8: “The Great Sin”

THE LARGER IDEA

Lewis says pride is competitive by nature. The problem is not enjoying intelligence, sport, appearance, achievement or possessions. The problem begins when their value depends on being ahead of somebody else. Social media can make this especially powerful because comparison becomes constant and measurable. If our satisfaction requires someone else to have less attention, fewer achievements or lower status, then success will never be enough. There will always be another person to beat.

REFLECT

1. How can comparison change the way we experience something that is actually good?
2. Where are you most tempted to measure your worth by whether you are ahead of other people?

One thought to carry into today...



Humility is freedom from constant self-focus

READ

To get even near it, even for a moment, is like a drink of cold water to a man in a desert. (4) Do not imagine that if you meet a really humble man he will be what most people call 'humble' nowadays: he will not be a sort of greasy, smarmy person, who is always telling you that, of course, he is nobody. Probably all you will think about him is that he seemed a cheerful, intelligent chap who took a real interest in what you said to him. If you do dislike him it will be because you feel a little envious of anyone who seems to enjoy life so easily. He will not be thinking about humility: he will not be thinking about himself at all. If anyone would like to acquire humility, I can, I think, tell him the first step. The first step is to realise that one is proud.

Source: Mere Christianity, Book III, Chapter 8: "The Great Sin"

THE LARGER IDEA

Lewis's picture of humility is very different from low self-esteem. The humble person does not constantly announce that they are unimportant. They are simply less trapped by the need to make every situation about themselves. That freedom allows them to take a real interest in other people. Healthy humility can therefore sit alongside confidence, joy and competence. The aim is not to think badly of yourself, but to become less preoccupied with yourself.

REFLECT

1. How is Lewis's description of humility different from low self-esteem?
 2. What might change in a conversation if you were less focused on how you were being perceived?
-
-

One thought to carry into today...



Growth begins with honest self-awareness

READ

Probably all you will think about him is that he seemed a cheerful, intelligent chap who took a real interest in what you said to him. If you do dislike him it will be because you feel a little envious of anyone who seems to enjoy life so easily. He will not be thinking about humility: he will not be thinking about himself at all. If anyone would like to acquire humility, I can, I think, tell him the first step. The first step is to realise that one is proud. And a biggish step, too. At least, nothing whatever can be done before it. If you think you are not conceited, it means you are very conceited indeed.

Source: Mere Christianity, Book III, Chapter 8: "The Great Sin"

THE LARGER IDEA

Lewis says humility begins by recognising pride. That is difficult because pride is often easier to see in someone else. We notice when another person interrupts, shows off, refuses correction or needs to win. We are much better at explaining our own behaviour. Self-awareness is therefore a formation skill. We cannot change what we refuse to notice. Christian reflection invites us to ask not merely "What did they do wrong?" but "What is happening in me?"

REFLECT

1. Why is pride often easier to identify in someone else than in ourselves?
2. What reaction in you—defensiveness, comparison, needing credit, needing the last word—might be worth noticing this week?

One thought to carry into today...



Repeated attitudes can slowly become part of us

READ

“The whole difficulty of understanding Hell is that the thing to be understood is so nearly Nothing. But ye’ll have had experiences . . . it begins with a grumbling mood, and yourself still distinct from it: perhaps criticising it. And yourself, in a dark hour, may will that mood, embrace it. Ye can repent and come out of it again. But there may come a day when you can do that no longer. Then there will be no you left to criticise the mood, nor even to enjoy it, but just the grumble itself going on forever like a machine.”

Source: The Great Divorce, Chapter 9

THE LARGER IDEA

Lewis imagines a grumbling mood becoming so repeatedly chosen that eventually there is almost nothing left except the grumble. It is an exaggerated picture, but it makes a serious point about formation. We can begin with an emotion and still stand apart from it: “I am feeling angry” or “I am becoming cynical.” But when we repeatedly feed an attitude, it can begin to define the way we interpret everything. The invitation is to notice a destructive pattern while we can still challenge it rather than simply calling it “who I am.”

REFLECT

1. What is the difference between experiencing a negative mood and allowing it to become your identity?
2. Is there an attitude you repeatedly feed that you would rather not become known for?

One thought to carry into today...

WEEK 04

Love & Other People

Learning to look beyond ourselves



What might this week help you notice?

Love is more than a feeling



READ

Originally it had a much wider meaning. (You can see how it got the modern sense. If a man has ‘charity’, giving to the poor is one of the most obvious things he does, and so people came to talk as if that were the whole of charity. In the same way, ‘rhyme’ is the most obvious thing about poetry, and so people come to mean by ‘poetry’ simply rhyme and nothing more.) Charity means ‘Love, in the Christian sense’. But love, in the Christian sense, does not mean an emotion. It is a state not of the feelings but of the will; that state of the will which we have naturally about ourselves, and must learn to have about other people.

Source: Mere Christianity, Book III, Chapter 9: “Charity”

THE LARGER IDEA

Lewis separates Christian love from liking. We naturally feel drawn to some people and not to others, but Christian love is a decision of the will to seek another person’s good. This makes love possible even when emotions are weak, relationships are difficult or personalities clash. Feelings matter, but they do not have to control whether we act with patience, dignity and care. Lewis’s approach makes love practical: it asks what we choose to do for the good of another person.

REFLECT

1. Why is it important to distinguish loving someone from simply liking them?
2. What could seeking someone’s good look like when you do not naturally get along with them?

One thought to carry into today...



Sometimes loving actions come before loving feelings

READ

But though natural likings should normally be encouraged, it would be quite wrong to think that the way to become charitable is to sit trying to manufacture affectionate feelings. Some people are ‘cold’ by temperament; that may be a misfortune for them, but it is no more a sin than having a bad digestion is a sin; and it does not cut them out from the chance, or excuse them from the duty, of learning charity. The rule for all of us is perfectly simple. Do not waste time bothering whether you ‘love’ your neighbour; act as if you did.

Source: Mere Christianity, Book III, Chapter 9: “Charity”

THE LARGER IDEA

Lewis argues that we should not wait for the perfect feeling before acting well. Behaviour can shape emotion. If we treat a person with deliberate kindness, patience and generosity, our attitude towards them may begin to change. The reverse can happen too: repeated contempt can deepen dislike. This is another example of formation through practice. We often imagine feelings create behaviour; Lewis reminds us that behaviour can also train feelings.

REFLECT

1. Why might waiting until you “feel like it” stop you from doing what is right?
2. Who could you treat with deliberate kindness this week even if your feelings have not caught up yet?

One thought to carry into today...



Separating a person from what they have done

READ

I can look at some of the things I have done with horror and loathing. So apparently I am allowed to loathe and hate some of the things my enemies do. Now that I come to think of it, I remember Christian teachers telling me long ago that I must hate a bad man's actions, but not hate the bad man: or, as they would say, hate the sin but not the sinner. For a long time I used to think this a silly, straw-splitting distinction: how could you hate what a man did and not hate the man?

Source: Mere Christianity, Book III, Chapter 7: "Forgiveness"

THE LARGER IDEA

Lewis used to think "hate the sin but not the sinner" was an unrealistic distinction. Then he noticed that he already did it with himself. He could strongly dislike something he had done without deciding that he was therefore a person with no worth. That becomes a model for how we can respond to others. Forgiveness does not require calling harmful behaviour acceptable. It means refusing to reduce the whole person to their worst action.

REFLECT

1. How can you strongly oppose what someone has done without deciding that the person has no value?
2. Why is it often easier to make this distinction for ourselves than for people who have hurt us?

One thought to carry into today...

Love wants more than comfort



READ

But since it is abundantly clear that I don't, and since I have reason to believe, nevertheless, that God is Love, I conclude that my conception of love needs correction. I might, indeed, have learned, even from the poets, that Love is something more stern and splendid than mere kindness: that even the love between the sexes is, as in Dante, 'a lord of terrible aspect'. There is kindness in Love: but Love and kindness are not coterminous, and when kindness (in the sense given above) is separated from the other elements of Love, it involves a certain fundamental indifference to its object, and even something like contempt of it.

Source: The Problem of Pain, Chapter 3: "Divine Goodness"

THE LARGER IDEA

Lewis argues that kindness and love are not identical. Mere kindness can become satisfied as long as nobody feels uncomfortable. Love cares about something deeper: the good and growth of the person loved. A parent, teacher, coach or friend who genuinely cares may sometimes challenge us rather than simply keeping us happy. Lewis applies this to God. Divine love is not indifference dressed up as niceness; it is committed to what we can become.

REFLECT

1. When can genuine love require more than simply making someone comfortable?
2. Who has challenged you in a way that was difficult at the time but was ultimately for your good?

One thought to carry into today...

God is not finished with us



READ

God's relation to man is pictured thus in Jeremiah's vision of the potter and the clay,⁴ or when St Peter speaks of the whole Church as a building on which God is at work, and of the individual members as stones.⁵ The limitation of such an analogy is, of course, that in the symbol the patient is not sentient, and that certain questions of justice and mercy which arise when the 'stones' are really 'living' therefore remain unrepresented. But it is an important analogy so far as it goes. We are, not metaphorically but in very truth, a Divine work of art, something that God is making, and therefore something with which He will not be satisfied until it has a certain character. Here again we come up against what I have called the 'intolerable compliment'.

Source: The Problem of Pain, Chapter 3: "Divine Goodness"

THE LARGER IDEA

Lewis describes people as works of art God is making. The image suggests both dignity and incompleteness. A great artist cares about the finished work and therefore does not shrug at every flaw in the process. Lewis's point is not that God is disappointed by imperfect people in the way a perfectionist might be. It is that God's love takes our formation seriously. We are loved as we are, but that love is committed to making us more whole, truthful and Christlike.

REFLECT

1. What does the image of being a "Divine work of art" suggest about your value?
 2. How can being loved as you are fit together with being called to grow and change?
-

One thought to carry into today...

WEEK 05

Pain, Courage & Resilience

Faith when life hurts



What might this week help you notice?



Sometimes presence matters more than explanations

READ

I must add, too, that the only purpose of the book is to solve the intellectual problem raised by suffering; for the far higher task of teaching fortitude and patience I was never fool enough to suppose myself qualified, nor have I anything to offer my readers except my conviction that when pain is to be borne, a little courage helps more than much knowledge, a little human sympathy more than much courage, and the least tincture of the love of God more than all.

Source: The Problem of Pain, Preface

THE LARGER IDEA

Lewis begins his book on suffering with humility. He knows that an intellectual explanation of pain is not the same as actually enduring it. When pain is real, courage, human sympathy and the love of God matter more than clever answers. This is an important lesson for how we respond to someone who is hurting. We can become so eager to explain or fix their situation that we forget to listen. Compassion may mean staying present when we cannot solve the problem.

REFLECT

1. Why can a correct explanation still be unhelpful to someone who is suffering?
2. What does good support look like when you cannot fix another person's problem?

One thought to carry into today...



Pain can interrupt our illusions

READ

Pain is not only immediately recognisable evil, but evil impossible to ignore. We can rest contentedly in our sins and in our stupidities; and anyone who has watched gluttons shovelling down the most exquisite foods as if they did not know what they were eating, will admit that we can ignore even pleasure. But pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pain: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.

Source: The Problem of Pain, Chapter 6: "Human Pain"

THE LARGER IDEA

Lewis is not saying pain is good or that every painful event has a simple reason. He is observing that pain is difficult to ignore. When life is comfortable, we can avoid important questions and live as though we are completely in control. Pain interrupts that illusion. It can force us to ask what we are relying on, what matters most and where our hope rests. The Christian claim is not that suffering should be enjoyed, but that God can meet and form us even there.

REFLECT

1. Why do difficult experiences often force people to think about things they normally avoid?
2. What is the difference between saying "pain is good" and saying "God can work through pain"?

One thought to carry into today...



Comfort can hide our need to change

READ

Hence the necessity to die daily: however often we think we have broken the rebellious self we shall still find it alive. That this process cannot be without pain is sufficiently witnessed by the very history of the word ‘Mortification’. But this intrinsic pain, or death, in mortifying the usurped self, is not the whole story. Paradoxically, mortification, though itself a pain, is made easier by the presence of pain in its context. This happens, I think, principally in three ways. The human spirit will not even begin to try to surrender self-will as long as all seems to be well with it.

Source: The Problem of Pain, Chapter 6: “Human Pain”

THE LARGER IDEA

Lewis suggests that when everything appears to be going well, we can easily assume that our way of living must also be fine. Success and comfort can hide patterns that need attention. Difficulty sometimes reveals how much control we expect to have, how dependent we are on approval, or how quickly we become resentful when life does not cooperate. Suffering does not automatically make people better, but it can expose what comfort allowed us to ignore.

REFLECT

1. Why can success make it harder to notice weaknesses in our character?
2. What does your response when plans go wrong reveal about what you rely on?

One thought to carry into today...



When the things we rely on suddenly look smaller

READ

I am progressing along the path of life in my ordinary contentedly fallen and godless condition, absorbed in a merry meeting with my friends for the morrow or a bit of work that tickles my vanity today, a holiday or a new book, when suddenly a stab of abdominal pain that threatens serious disease, or a headline in the newspapers that threatens us all with destruction, sends this whole pack of cards tumbling down. At first I am overwhelmed, and all my little happinesses look like broken toys. Then, slowly and reluctantly, bit by bit, I try to bring myself into the frame of mind that I should be in at all times.

Source: The Problem of Pain, Chapter 6: "Human Pain"

THE LARGER IDEA

Lewis describes ordinary pleasures—plans, work, holidays, books—as good things that can quietly become too important. A crisis can suddenly make them look like “broken toys.” His point is not that everyday happiness is worthless. It is that these good things were never meant to carry the full weight of our identity or hope. When they are shaken, we discover whether we have something deeper to stand on.

REFLECT

1. What good things are easiest to rely on as though they could never change?
2. If one of those things disappeared, what deeper source of identity or hope would remain?

One thought to carry into today...



Becoming real can be uncomfortable

READ

“Will you come with me to the mountains? It will hurt at first, until your feet are hardened. Reality is harsh to the feet of shadows. But will you come?” “Well, that is a plan. I am perfectly ready to consider it. Of course I should require some assurances . . . I should want a guarantee that you are taking me to a place where I shall find a wider sphere of usefulness—and scope for the talents that God has given me—and an atmosphere of free inquiry.”

Source: The Great Divorce, Chapter 5

THE LARGER IDEA

In Lewis’s fantasy, the ghosts find Heaven painfully solid because they themselves are insubstantial. “Reality is harsh to the feet of shadows” becomes a picture of growth. Truth can hurt at first because it exposes illusions, habits and excuses we have grown comfortable with. The answer is not to retreat into unreality but to become more solid. Maturity often feels like this: telling the truth, receiving correction, taking responsibility and learning to live in reality rather than the version of things we would prefer.

REFLECT

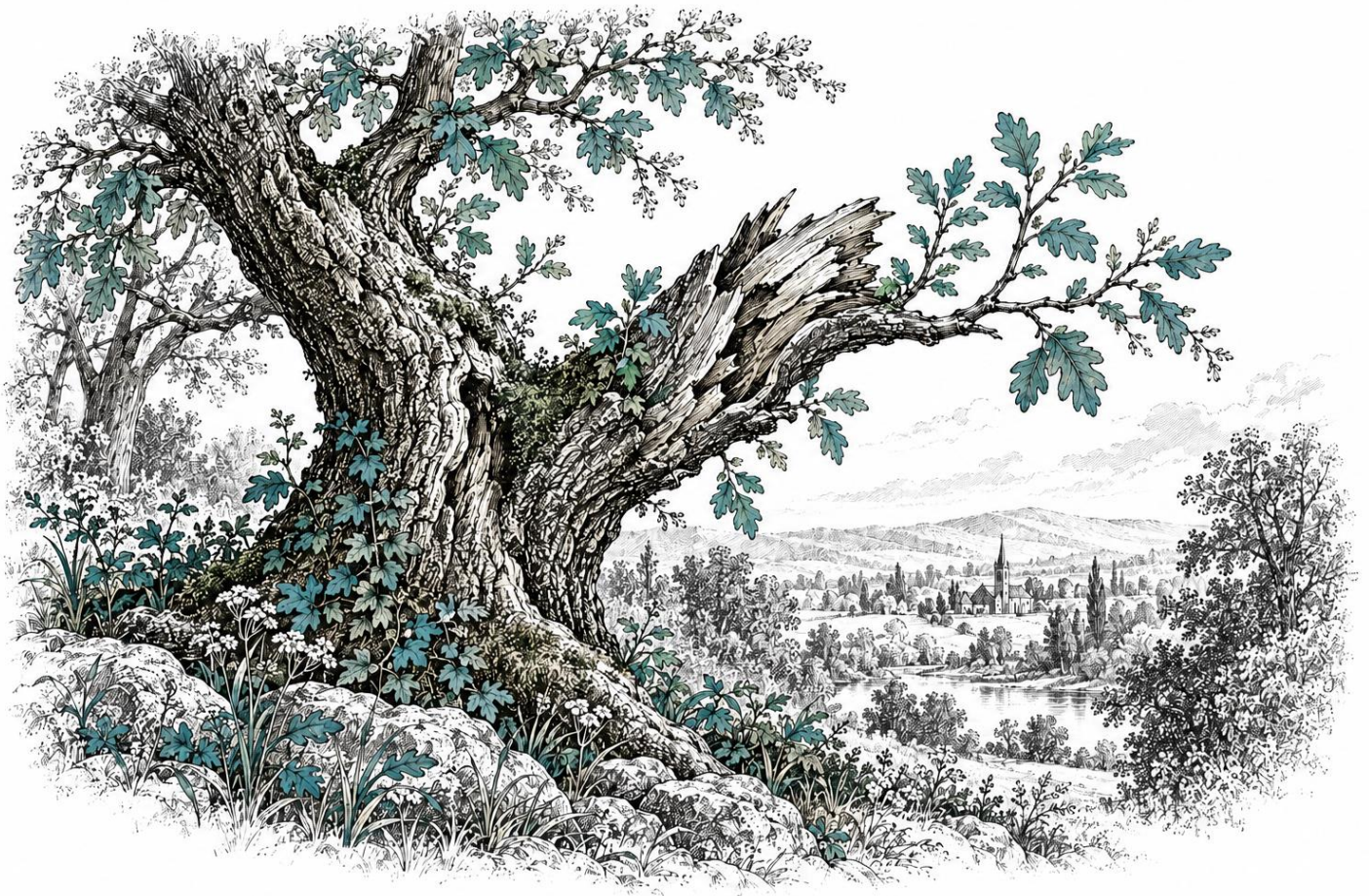
1. Why can reality feel painful when we have become comfortable with an illusion?
2. What truth about yourself or your situation might require courage to face?

One thought to carry into today...

WEEK 06

Faith, Doubt & Trust

Holding on when feelings change



What might this week help you notice?



Faith is not the same as a passing mood

READ

I am not talking of moments at which any real new reasons against Christianity turn up. Those have to be faced and that is a different matter. I am talking about moments when a mere mood rises up against it. Now Faith, in the sense in which I am here using the word, is the art of holding on to things your reason has once accepted, in spite of your changing moods. For moods will change, whatever view your reason takes. I know that by experience. Now that I am a Christian I do have moods in which the whole thing looks very improbable: but when I was an atheist I had moods in which Christianity looked terribly probable.

Source: Mere Christianity, Book III, Chapter 11: "Faith"

THE LARGER IDEA

Lewis distinguishes between real reasons for changing a belief and moods that make a belief feel less convincing for a while. Our emotions move constantly. A commitment can seem obvious one day and difficult the next without any new evidence appearing. Faith, for Lewis, includes training ourselves not to let every mood become a new worldview. That does not mean refusing questions. Genuine reasons should be examined. It means recognising that feelings are important but are not always reliable judges of truth.

REFLECT

1. What is the difference between having a new reason to doubt something and simply being in a different mood?
 2. What important commitment in your life becomes harder to remember when your feelings change?
-
-

One thought to carry into today...



Resistance reveals the strength of temptation

READ

I want to add now that the next step is to make some serious attempt to practise the Christian virtues. A week is not enough. Things often go swimmingly for the first week. Try six weeks. By that time, having, as far as one can see, fallen back completely or even fallen lower than the point one began from, one will have discovered some truths about oneself. No man knows how bad he is till he has tried very hard to be good. A silly idea is current that good people do not know what temptation means. This is an obvious lie.

Source: Mere Christianity, Book III, Chapter 11: "Faith"

THE LARGER IDEA

Lewis argues that we often discover the strength of a temptation only when we resist it. Giving in quickly does not show us how powerful the pressure would have become. This makes failure during serious effort less surprising. Trying to become patient may reveal how impatient we are. Trying to control our words may show us how automatic certain habits have become. That discovery can be humbling, but it is also useful because we cannot grow in areas we do not recognise.

REFLECT

1. Why might trying hard to do what is right make you more aware of your weaknesses?
2. What have you learned about yourself by genuinely trying to change a habit?

One thought to carry into today...



What we believe needs to be rehearsed

READ

Consequently one must train the habit of Faith. The first step is to recognise the fact that your moods change. The next is to make sure that, if you have once accepted Christianity, then some of its main doctrines shall be deliberately held before your mind for some time every day. That is why daily prayers and religious readings and churchgoing are necessary parts of the Christian life. We have to be continually reminded of what we believe. Neither this belief nor any other will automatically remain alive in the mind. It must be fed.

Source: Mere Christianity, Book III, Chapter 11: "Faith"

THE LARGER IDEA

Lewis says beliefs do not remain vivid in our minds automatically. We forget, drift and become absorbed in whatever is loudest today. Practices such as prayer, Scripture, worship and Christian community are therefore not just religious chores. They are ways of placing truth back in front of us until it becomes part of how we see. Formation requires repetition. What we repeatedly remember is more likely to shape us when pressure arrives.

REFLECT

1. Why do important beliefs fade from our attention even if we still agree with them?
2. What practice helps you remember what matters when life becomes busy or stressful?

One thought to carry into today...

Waiting can be part of formation



READ

It is true that some people may find they have to wait in the hall for a considerable time, while others feel certain almost at once which door they must knock at. I do not know why there is this difference, but I am sure God keeps no one waiting unless He sees that it is good for him to wait. When you do get into your room you will find that the long wait has done you some kind of good which you would not have had otherwise.

Source: Mere Christianity, Preface

THE LARGER IDEA

Lewis uses the image of Christianity as a hall leading to different rooms and acknowledges that some people may need to wait before they know where they belong. His striking claim is that waiting itself may do something good in us. We usually treat waiting as wasted time between the question and the answer. Lewis asks whether patience, humility, prayer and honesty might be formed precisely in the period when certainty has not yet arrived.

REFLECT

1. Why do we tend to treat waiting as wasted time?
2. What might God form in a person during a season when they do not yet have the answer they want?

One thought to carry into today...



Freedom eventually becomes surrender in one direction or another

READ

And it would be no use to come further even if it were possible. The sane would do no good if they made themselves mad to help madmen." "But what of the poor Ghosts who never get into the omnibus at all?" "Everyone who wishes it does. Never fear. There are only two kinds of people in: those who say to God, 'Thy will be done,' and those to whom God says, in, 'Thy will be done.' All that are in Hell, choose it. Without that self-choice there could be no Hell.

Source: The Great Divorce, Chapter 9

THE LARGER IDEA

Lewis presents a deliberately sharp picture of human freedom: either we increasingly say to God, “Your will be done,” or we insist so strongly on our own way that God eventually allows us to have it. The point is not that every choice is simple. It is that freedom has direction. We are not neutral forever. Repeated choices can become commitments, and commitments can become the shape of a life. For Lewis, surrender to God is not the destruction of freedom but its proper use.

REFLECT

1. What do you think Lewis means by the two different uses of “Thy will be done”?
2. Where does genuine freedom require more than simply doing whatever you feel like doing?

One thought to carry into today...

WEEK 07

Hope, Desire & Heaven

Wanting something bigger



What might this week help you notice?



What you aim at shapes what you do now

READ

If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next. The Apostles themselves, who set on foot the conversion of the Roman Empire, the great men who built up the Middle Ages, the English Evangelicals who abolished the Slave Trade, all left their mark on Earth, precisely because their minds were occupied with Heaven. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this. Aim at Heaven and you will get earth ‘thrown in’: aim at earth and you will get neither.

Source: Mere Christianity, Book III, Chapter 10: “Hope”

THE LARGER IDEA

Lewis rejects the idea that thinking about eternity makes Christians useless in the present. He argues that people with a horizon bigger than themselves have often been able to work for change without making temporary success their ultimate hope. If comfort, popularity or achievement becomes the final goal, it can dominate us. Christian hope gives present life significance without asking the present world to be everything.

REFLECT

1. How can having a bigger purpose make someone more useful in the present rather than less?
2. What does your current use of time suggest that you are “aiming at”?

One thought to carry into today...



Our deepest longings may point beyond themselves

READ

In that case it would be a pity to find out too late (a moment after death) that by our supposed ‘common sense’ we had stifled in ourselves the faculty of enjoying it. (3) The Christian Way—The Christian says, ‘Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for those desires exists. A baby feels hunger: well, there is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim: well, there is such a thing as water. Men feel sexual desire: well, there is such a thing as sex. If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world. If none of my earthly pleasures satisfy it, that does not prove that the universe is a fraud.

Source: Mere Christianity, Book III, Chapter 10: “Hope”

THE LARGER IDEA

Lewis notices that even the best experiences often leave us wanting something more. His argument is not that food, friendship, achievement, travel or beauty are disappointing. They can be genuinely wonderful. But they may awaken a longing they cannot finally satisfy. Lewis interprets that longing as a clue: perhaps we were made for more than this world can provide. Earthly pleasures can then be received as signs and gifts rather than forced to become ultimate answers.

REFLECT

1. Why do even very good experiences fail to satisfy us permanently?
2. What is something you have wanted badly, received, and then discovered could not carry all the hope you placed in it?

One thought to carry into today...



Do not let the work of faith replace God

READ

He cared nothing about joy. In he went away." "How fantastic!" said I. "Do ye think so?" said the Teacher with a piercing glance. "It is nearer to such as you than ye think. There have been men before now who got so interested in proving the existence of God that they came to care nothing for God Himself ... as if the good Lord had nothing to do but exist! There have been some who were so occupied in spreading Christianity that they never gave a thought to Christ. Man! Ye see it in smaller matters.

Source: The Great Divorce, Chapter 9

THE LARGER IDEA

Lewis warns that even religious activity can become a substitute for God. A person can become fascinated with arguments about God while forgetting to love God, or become so busy doing Christian work that Christ himself becomes strangely absent. The same pattern appears elsewhere: collecting books can replace reading them; organising charity can replace caring for people. The means quietly becomes the end. This is a useful question for any achievement-driven person: has the activity that was meant to serve something good become the thing I actually worship?

REFLECT

1. How can a good activity gradually become disconnected from the reason it existed in the first place?
2. Could anything in your life—study, sport, ministry, achievement—be becoming more important than the good it was meant to serve?

One thought to carry into today...



Reality is bigger than the world inside our head

READ

What seemed, when they entered it, to be the vale of misery turns out, when they look back, to have been a well; and where present experience saw only salt deserts memory truthfully records that the pools were full of water." "Then those people are right who say that Heaven and Hell are only states of mind?" "Hush," said he sternly. "Do not blaspheme. Hell is a state of mind-ye never said a truer word. And every state of mind, left to itself, every shutting up of the creature within the dungeon of its own mind-is, in, Hell.

Source: The Great Divorce, Chapter 9

THE LARGER IDEA

Lewis imagines Hell as the final result of a person closing themselves inside their own mind, while Heaven is “reality itself.” The image challenges the idea that whatever feels true to me automatically is true. Our thoughts and emotions matter deeply, but they need contact with reality outside ourselves—with God, truth and other people. Isolation can allow resentment, fear or self-justification to become an entire private world. Growth requires the humility to let reality correct us.

REFLECT

1. What can happen when someone treats their own perspective as the only reality that matters?
2. Who or what helps you test your assumptions instead of becoming trapped inside them?

One thought to carry into today...



Some rewards belong naturally to what we love

READ

If there is not, then Christianity is false, for this doctrine is woven into its whole fabric. If there is, then this truth, like any other, must be faced, whether it is useful at political meetings or no. Again, we are afraid that heaven is a bribe, and that if we make it our goal we shall no longer be disinterested. It is not so. Heaven offers nothing that a mercenary soul can desire. It is safe to tell the pure in heart that they shall see God, for only the pure in heart want to.

Source: The Problem of Pain, Chapter 10: "Heaven"

THE LARGER IDEA

Lewis responds to the criticism that hoping for Heaven makes Christian faith selfish. He distinguishes between a bribe and a reward that naturally completes a desire. Loving poetry and wanting to read it is not mercenary; loving someone and wanting relationship with them is not a corrupt motive. In the same way, the Christian hope of seeing God is meaningful only to someone who actually desires God. The question becomes not merely "What reward do I get?" but "What am I learning to love?"

REFLECT

1. What is the difference between a bribe and a reward that naturally belongs to something you love?
2. What do your strongest hopes reveal about what you are learning to value?

One thought to carry into today...

WEEK 08

Education & the Formation of Desire

Training the head, heart and habits



What might this week help you notice?



Education should form desire, not only control it

READ

They see the world around them swayed by emotional propaganda—they have learned from tradition that youth is sentimental—and they conclude that the best thing they can do is to fortify the minds of young people against emotion. My own experience as a teacher tells an opposite tale. For every one pupil who needs to be guarded from a weak excess of sensibility there are three who need to be awakened from the slumber of cold vulgarity. The task of the modern educator is not to cut down jungles but to irrigate deserts. The right defence against false sentiments is to inculcate just sentiments.

Source: The Abolition of Man, Chapter 1: "Men Without Chests"

THE LARGER IDEA

Lewis thinks education can fail by assuming young people mainly need their emotions reduced or debunked. He argues that many students instead need help learning to recognise and love what is genuinely worthy. Education should not only protect us from false emotion; it should cultivate appropriate responses to courage, beauty, justice, sacrifice and truth. In other words, character education is not merely teaching rules. It is helping the heart learn what deserves admiration.

REFLECT

1. What do you think Lewis means by “irrigating deserts”?
2. What is one good quality that education should teach students not only to understand but to admire?

One thought to carry into today...



The answer to bad feelings is not having no feelings

READ

They see the world around them swayed by emotional propaganda—they have learned from tradition that youth is sentimental—and they conclude that the best thing they can do is to fortify the minds of young people against emotion. My own experience as a teacher tells an opposite tale. For every one pupil who needs to be guarded from a weak excess of sensibility there are three who need to be awakened from the slumber of cold vulgarity. The task of the modern educator is not to cut down jungles but to irrigate deserts. The right defence against false sentiments is to inculcate just sentiments. By starving the sensibility of our pupils we only make them easier prey to the propagandist when he comes.

Source: The Abolition of Man, Chapter 1: "Men Without Chests"

THE LARGER IDEA

Lewis does not believe emotion should rule reason. But neither does he think the solution to manipulative emotion is becoming emotionally numb. A person with no trained loves can still be manipulated—perhaps even more easily. The better defence is learning to respond appropriately: compassion to suffering, admiration to courage, anger at injustice, gratitude for generosity. Character involves educating our emotional responses so that they increasingly match what is true and good.

REFLECT

1. Why might emotional numbness fail to protect someone from manipulation?
 2. What is one situation where the right emotional response matters as much as knowing the facts?
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One thought to carry into today...



Reason needs trained character to guide desire

READ

We were told it all long ago by Plato. As the king governs by his executive, so Reason in man must rule the mere appetites by means of the 'spirited element'. 20 The head rules the belly through the chest—the seat, as Alanus tells us, of Magnanimity, 21 of emotions organized by trained habit into stable sentiments. The Chest-Magnanimity-Sentiment—these are the indispensable liaison officers between cerebral man and visceral man. It may even be said that it is by this middle element that man is man: for by his intellect he is mere spirit and by his appetite mere animal.

Source: The Abolition of Man, Chapter 1: "Men Without Chests"

THE LARGER IDEA

Lewis borrows an old picture of the human person: the head represents reason, the belly represents appetite, and the chest represents trained character and rightly ordered emotion. Reason may know what is right, but knowledge alone does not always overpower desire. We need habits, loves and loyalties that help us act on what we know. This is why formation matters. The goal is not to eliminate emotion, but to train it so that reason and desire can work together toward the good.

REFLECT

1. Have you ever known the right thing to do but still found yourself wanting the opposite?
2. What habits can strengthen the “chest”—the character that helps you act on what you know?

One thought to carry into today...



We cannot demand character while refusing to form it

READ

Their heads are no bigger than the ordinary: it is the atrophy of the chest beneath that makes them seem so. And all the time—such is the tragi-comedy of our situation—we continue to clamour for those very qualities we are rendering impossible. You can hardly open a periodical without coming across the statement that what our civilization needs is more 'drive', or dynamism, or self-sacrifice, or 'creativity'. In a sort of ghastly simplicity we remove the organ and demand the function. We make men without chests and expect of them virtue and enterprise. We laugh at honour and are shocked to find traitors in our midst.

Source: The Abolition of Man, Chapter 1: "Men Without Chests"

THE LARGER IDEA

Lewis criticises a culture that removes the language and formation of virtue, then complains when people lack courage, loyalty, sacrifice and integrity. His memorable phrase “men without chests” describes people whose intelligence and appetite have not been joined by formed character. The warning applies to schools, families and communities: if we want young people to live by values under pressure, we must do more than display the values on a wall. They need to be taught, practised, modelled and loved.

REFLECT

1. Why is it inconsistent to expect virtue if we never deliberately form it?
2. Which character quality needs more practice—not just more discussion—in your life or community?

One thought to carry into today...



Power always raises the question: who gets to decide?

READ

By contraception simply, they are denied existence; by contraception used as a means of selective breeding, they are, without their concurring voice, made to be what one generation, for its own reasons, may choose to prefer. From this point of view, what we call Man's power over Nature turns out to be a power exercised by some men over other men with Nature as its instrument. It is, of course, a commonplace to complain that men have hitherto used badly, and against their fellows, the powers that science has given them, But that is not the point I am trying to make.

Source: The Abolition of Man, Chapter 3: "The Abolition of Man"

THE LARGER IDEA

Lewis warns that technological power is never simply abstract “humanity controlling nature.” In practice, technologies are designed and controlled by particular people, institutions and generations, and their choices affect others. His concern is especially relevant in an age of algorithms, biotechnology and artificial intelligence. The question is not only “Can we do this?” but “Who gains power, over whom, and according to what values?” Knowledge and capability therefore require moral formation, not just technical skill.

REFLECT

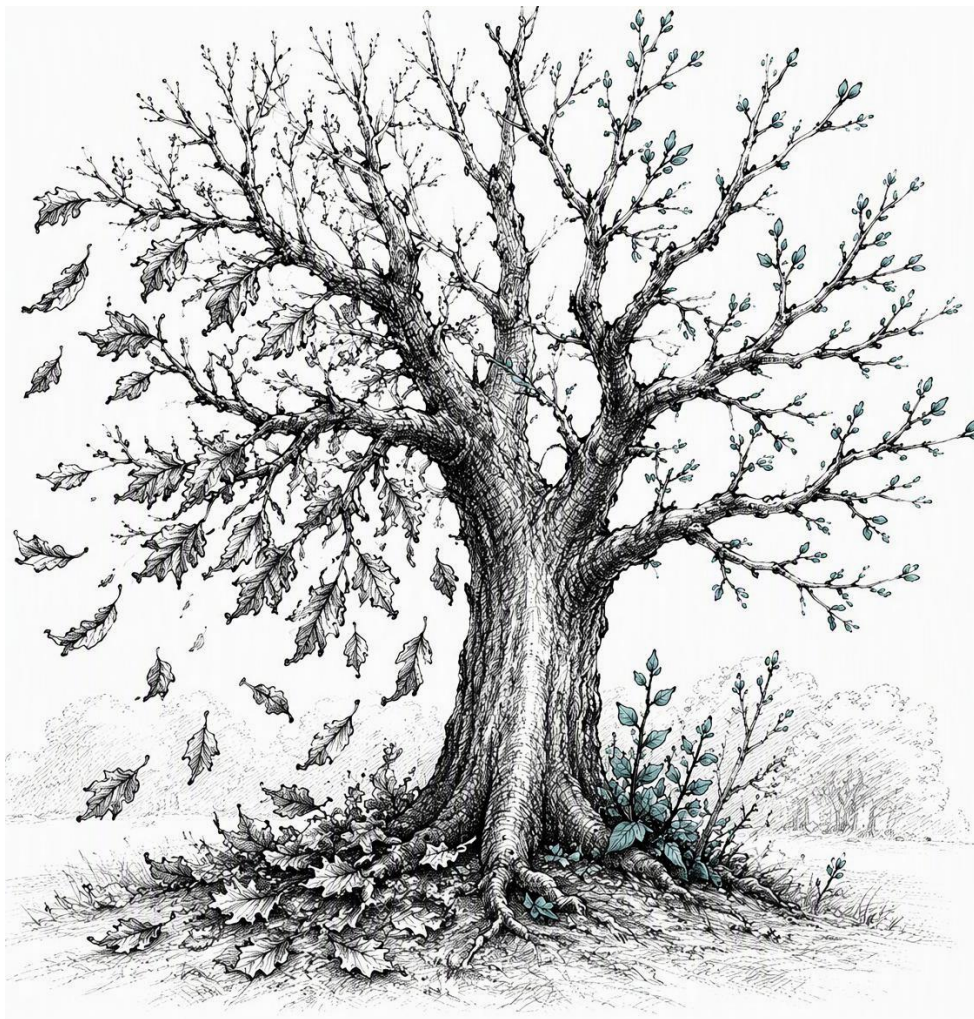
1. Why does greater technological power also create greater moral responsibility?
2. Think of a current technology. Who has power through it, and what values should guide how that power is used?

One thought to carry into today...

WEEK 09

Surrender & Transformation

Christianity as more than self-improvement



What might this week help you notice?



Christianity asks for the whole person

READ

In the end, you will either give up trying to be good, or else become one of those people who, as they say, ‘live for others’ but always in a discontented, grumbling way—always wondering why the others do not notice it more and always making a martyr of yourself. And once you have become that you will be a far greater pest to anyone who has to live with you than you would have been if you had remained frankly selfish. The Christian way is different: harder, and easier. Christ says ‘Give me All. I don’t want so much of your time and so much of your money and so much of your work: I want You.’

Source: Mere Christianity, Book IV, Chapter 8: “Is Christianity Hard or Easy?”

THE LARGER IDEA

Lewis says Christianity is harder and easier than simply trying to improve a few behaviours. It is harder because Christ does not ask only for a religious section of our week. He asks for the whole person. But Lewis also thinks it is easier because we stop trying to manufacture a perfect self through sheer willpower. Christian formation begins with surrender: allowing God to reshape desires, habits, priorities and identity rather than merely adding religious behaviour to an unchanged centre.

REFLECT

1. Why is giving God parts of our life easier than giving him ourselves?
2. What area of your life are you most tempted to keep separate from your faith?

One thought to carry into today...



The goal is participation in God's life

READ

The Son of God became a man to enable men to become sons of God. We do not know—anyway, I do not know—how things would have worked if the human race had never rebelled against God and joined the enemy. Perhaps every man would have been ‘in Christ’, would have shared the life of the Son of God, from the moment he was born. Perhaps the Bios or natural life would have been drawn up into the Zoe, the uncreated life, at once and as a matter of course.

Source: Mere Christianity, Book IV, Chapter 5: “The Obstinate Toy Soldiers”

THE LARGER IDEA

Lewis describes salvation as far more than being forgiven and then left unchanged. The Son of God becomes human so that human beings can share in the life of God as adopted sons and daughters. Lewis uses vivid images of toy soldiers becoming alive and creatures being drawn into a new kind of life. The goal of Christian formation is therefore not simply behaving better; it is becoming people whose lives increasingly reflect the life and character of Christ.

REFLECT

1. How is Lewis's picture of Christianity bigger than simply “trying to be a good person”?
2. What might sharing more deeply in the life of Christ change in an ordinary school day?

One thought to carry into today...



The aim of Christian formation is Christlikeness

READ

If we share in this kind of life we also shall be sons of God. We shall love the Father as He does and the Holy Ghost will arise in us. He came to this world and became a man in order to spread to other men the kind of life He has—by what I call ‘good infection’. Every Christian is to become a little Christ. The whole purpose of becoming a Christian is simply nothing else.

Source: Mere Christianity, Book IV, Chapter 4: “Good Infection”

THE LARGER IDEA

Lewis states the goal with startling simplicity: “Every Christian is to become a little Christ.” He does not mean becoming identical personalities or pretending to be Jesus. He means receiving Christ’s kind of life so that his love, obedience, courage and relationship with the Father increasingly take shape in us. This gives Christian character a centre. The ultimate goal is not merely to collect virtues as personal achievements; virtues are expressions of a life being formed into the likeness of Christ.

REFLECT

1. What do you think Lewis means—and does not mean—by becoming “a little Christ”?
2. Which aspect of Christ’s character would you most want to become more visible in your life?

One thought to carry into today...



Sometimes practice comes before feeling

READ

Its very first words are Our Father. Do you now see what those words mean? They mean quite frankly, that you are putting yourself in the place of a son of God. To put it bluntly, you are dressing up as Christ. If you like, you are pretending. Because, of course, the moment you realise what the words mean, you realise that you are not a son of God. You are not a being like The Son of God, whose will and interests are at one with those of the Father: you are a bundle of self-centred fears, hopes, greeds, jealousies, and self-conceit, all doomed to death.

Source: Mere Christianity, Book IV, Chapter 7: "Let's Pretend"

THE LARGER IDEA

Lewis uses the surprising language of “pretending” to describe prayer. When Christians say “Our Father,” they are stepping into the identity of Christ before they fully resemble him. But Lewis distinguishes good pretending from hypocrisy. Good pretending is like practising a role that helps us grow into reality. We may choose patience before we feel patient, pray before we feel spiritual, or act kindly before affection appears. Grace meets us in the practice and begins changing what was first only imitation.

REFLECT

1. What is the difference between hypocrisy and practising a good way of living before it feels natural?
2. Where might “acting as the person you want to become” help form a real habit?

One thought to carry into today...



God is making something new, not merely nicer

READ

But we must not suppose that even if we succeeded in making everyone nice we should have saved their souls. A world of nice people, content in their own niceness, looking no further, turned away from God, would be just as desperately in need of salvation as a miserable world—and might even be more difficult to save. For mere improvement is not redemption, though redemption always improves people even here and now and will, in, improve them to a degree we cannot yet imagine. God became man to turn creatures into sons: not simply to produce better men of the old kind but to produce a new kind of man.

Source: Mere Christianity, Book IV, Chapter 10: “Nice People or New Men”

THE LARGER IDEA

Lewis refuses to reduce Christianity to producing polite, respectable people. Niceness can be good, but it is not the same as new life. A person may be naturally pleasant and remain deeply self-centred; another may have a difficult temperament yet be undergoing profound transformation. God is not merely polishing the old self. Lewis describes redemption as the creation of a new kind of person. This helps us measure growth differently: not by comparison with somebody else, but by whether we are becoming more responsive to God.

REFLECT

1. Why might being naturally “nice” not be the same thing as spiritual transformation?
 2. How could you measure growth without constantly comparing yourself with other people?
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One thought to carry into today...

WEEK 10

Becoming

The person God is forming



What might this week help you notice?



Following Christ does not erase individuality

READ

They do not show their real taste till you have added the salt. (Of course, as I warned you, this is not really a very good illustration, because you can, after all, kill the other tastes by putting in too much salt, whereas you cannot kill the taste of a human personality by putting in too much Christ. I am doing the best I can.) It is something like that with Christ and us. The more we get what we now call ‘ourselves’ out of the way and let Him take us over, the more truly ourselves we become. There is so much of Him that millions and millions of ‘little Christs’, all different, will still be too few to express Him fully.

Source: Mere Christianity, Book IV, Chapter 11: “The New Men”

THE LARGER IDEA

A common fear is that surrendering to God will make everyone bland and identical. Lewis argues the opposite. Christ is not a force that erases personality; he is the source from whom true personality comes. The more people are centred on Christ, the more fully their distinctiveness can emerge without being dominated by insecurity, comparison or appetite. Holiness is not mass production. Lewis pictures millions of different “little Christs,” each expressing something of God in a genuinely personal way.

REFLECT

1. Why might becoming more like Christ make people more distinctive rather than less?
2. Which parts of your personality are gifts that could become healthier and freer as your character grows?

One thought to carry into today...



We discover ourselves by giving ourselves away

READ

I am not, in my natural state, nearly so much of a person as I like to believe: most of what I call ‘me’ can be very easily explained. It is when I turn to Christ, when I give myself up to His Personality, that I first begin to have a real personality of my own. At the beginning I said there were Personalities in God. I will go further now. There are no real personalities anywhere else. Until you have given up your self to Him you will not have a real self. Sameness is to be found most among the most ‘natural’ men, not among those who surrender to Christ.

Source: Mere Christianity, Book IV, Chapter 11: “The New Men”

THE LARGER IDEA

Lewis challenges the idea that the best route to identity is endless self-focus. He thinks the self becomes most real when it is surrendered to Christ. Tyrants can appear highly individual, yet Lewis says selfishness often makes people surprisingly alike: driven by the same hunger for control, praise and power. The saints, by contrast, become “gloriously different.” Identity is not lost when the ego stops being the centre. It can finally become free.

REFLECT

1. Why does Lewis think selfishness can actually make people more alike?
2. How might focusing less on constructing an image of yourself help you become more genuinely yourself?

One thought to carry into today...



Your real self is found while looking beyond yourself

READ

But there must be a real giving up of the self. You must throw it away ‘blindly’ so to speak. Christ will indeed give you a real personality: but you must not go to Him for the sake of that. As long as your own personality is what you are bothering about you are not going to Him at all. The very first step is to try to forget about the self altogether. Your real, new self (which is Christ’s and also yours, and yours just because it is His) will not come as long as you are looking for it.

Source: Mere Christianity, Book IV, Chapter 11: “The New Men”

THE LARGER IDEA

Lewis says even the desire to “find myself” can become another form of self-obsession. If personal identity is the thing we stare at constantly, it remains difficult to receive as a gift. He compares this with ordinary life: people often make their best impression when they stop monitoring the impression they are making. For Lewis, the Christian self is discovered indirectly—by turning toward Christ, truth, love and service. We become ourselves while giving attention to something greater than ourselves.

REFLECT

1. Why can constantly thinking about your image make it harder to be natural?
2. What worthwhile person, purpose or practice could help draw your attention beyond yourself?

One thought to carry into today...



Losing the false self to receive the real one

READ

Even in social life, you will never make a good impression on other people until you stop thinking about what sort of impression you are making. Even in literature and art, no man who bothers about originality will ever be original: whereas if you simply try to tell the truth (without caring twopence how often it has been told before) you will, nine times out of ten, become original without ever having noticed it. The principle runs through all life from top to bottom. Give up yourself, and you will find your real self. Lose your life and you will save it.

Source: Mere Christianity, Book IV, Chapter 11: "The New Men"

THE LARGER IDEA

Lewis brings the paradox of Christian discipleship to the centre: we find life by giving it away. He sees the need to surrender ambitions and desires that have become ultimate, not because desire itself is bad but because the self cannot be its own final centre. This is demanding language. Yet Lewis believes surrender does not end in emptiness. What is lost is the cramped version of selfhood built around control; what is received is a fuller life rooted in Christ.

REFLECT

1. Why does "giving up yourself" sound frightening?
2. What is the difference between losing your identity and surrendering the need to control your identity?

One thought to carry into today...

The final direction: look for Christ



READ

Give up yourself, and you will find your real self. Lose your life and you will save it. Submit to death, death of your ambitions and favourite wishes every day and death of your whole body in the end: submit with every fibre of your being, and you will find eternal life. Keep back nothing. Nothing that you have not given away will be really yours. Nothing in you that has not died will ever be raised from the dead. Look for yourself, and you will find in the long run only hatred, loneliness, despair, rage, ruin, and decay. But look for Christ and you will find Him, and with Him everything else thrown in.

Source: Mere Christianity, Book IV, Chapter 11: "The New Men"

THE LARGER IDEA

Lewis ends *Mere Christianity* by bringing the whole argument back to its centre. If we make the self our final project, we eventually become trapped inside it. If we look toward Christ, Lewis believes we receive not only Christ but the restored self, relationships, purpose and life we were trying unsuccessfully to secure on our own. This is a fitting ending for a term about formation. The ultimate Christian question is not simply "What kind of person do I want to become?" but "Who am I following, and what is that relationship making of me?"

REFLECT

1. Across this term, which Lewis idea has most challenged the way you think about formation?
2. What would it look like for you to "look for Christ" in one concrete part of your life next term?

One thought to carry into today...

