

C S Lewis on Prayer



Clive Staples Lewis

- Famous today for the Chronicles of Narnia but in lifetime as a leading Christian apologeticist
- He was a Fellow and Tutor in English Literature at Oxford University from 1925 until 1954
- Lewis actually wrote more than thirty books

Timeline 1898–1963

1908 Sent to the Wynyard School in Watford.

1916 Receives a scholarship to University College, Oxford.

1917- 1918 Serves as an officer in WW1. Wounded at Battle of Arras.
His close friend Paddy Moore killed in battle.

1925 Appointed English Fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford,
tutors English Language and Literature.

1926 Meets friend and colleague J.R.R. Tolkien.

1929 Abandons atheism and converts to theism.

1931 Owing to the influence of Tolkien and others, Lewis converts to
Christianity.

1941 Begins war-time broadcast talks, later collected as *Mere
Christianity*.

Meets the American writer Joy Davidman

1956 Marries Joy Davidman

1960 Joy's illness and death from cancer (A Grief Observed)

Writing

- The Chronicles of Narnia (series of 7 books)
- Science fiction trilogy
- The Screwtape Letters (2 books)
- Letters to Malcolm
- The Problem of Pain
- Mere Christianity
- A Grief Observed
- Others ...

So what does he say about prayer?

“The world was made partly that there might be prayer; partly that our prayers for George might be answered.

But let's have finished with “partly.” The great work of art was made for the sake of all it does and is, down to the curve of every wave and the flight of every insect.”

The Prayer Course

- Adoration
- Petition
- Intercession
- Dealing with Disappointment
- Learning to Listen
- Spiritual Warfare

Adoration

- ‘in commanding us to glorify him, God is inviting us to enjoy Him.’ (Reflections on the Psalms)
- Adoration is doing what comes naturally. ‘I had never noticed that all enjoyment spontaneously overflows into praise ... The world rings with praise – lovers praising their mistresses, readers praising their favourite poet, walkers praising the countryside, players praising their favourite game.’

Finding a “holy place”

- “It is well to have specifically holy places, and things, and days, for, without these focal points or reminders, the belief that all is holy and "big with God" will soon dwindle into a mere sentiment. But if these holy places, things, and days cease to remind us, if they obliterate our awareness that all ground is holy and every bush (could we but perceive it) a Burning Bush, then the hallows begin to do harm.”
- “A concentrated mind and a sitting body make for better prayer than a kneeling body and a mind half asleep.”

Petition

“To think of our prayers as just ‘causes’ would suggest that the whole importance of petitionary prayer lay in the achievement of the thing asked for. But really, for our spiritual life as a whole, the ‘being taken into account,’ or ‘considered,’ matters more than the being granted.

Religious people don’t talk about the ‘results’ of prayer; they talk of its being ‘answered’ or ‘heard’.... We can bear to be refused but not to be ignored. In other words, our faith can survive many refusals if they really are refusals and not mere disregards. The apparent stone will be bread to us if we believe that a Father’s hand put it into ours, in mercy or in justice or even in rebuke.”

Intercession

- “For prayer is request. The essence of request, as distinct from compulsion, is that it may or may not be granted.”
- “It is no use to ask God with factitious [artificially created] earnestness for A when our whole mind is in reality filled with the desire for B. We must lay before Him what is in us, not what ought to be in us.”

Dealing with Disappointment (A Grief Observed)

- “Can a mortal ask questions which God finds unanswerable? Quite easily, I should think. All nonsense questions are unanswerable. How many hours are in a mile? Is yellow square or round? Probably half the questions we ask - half our great theological and metaphysical problems - are like that.”
- “The time when there is nothing at all in your soul except a cry for help may be just that time when God can't give it: you are like the drowning man who can't be helped because he clutches and grabs. Perhaps your own reiterated cries deafen you to the voice you hoped to hear.”
- “Knock and it shall be opened.' But does knocking mean hammering and kicking the door like a maniac?”

Learning to Listen

- “God sometimes seems to speak to us most intimately when He catches us, as it were, off our guard. Our preparations to receive Him sometimes have the opposite effect.”
- “Our struggle is--isn't it?--to achieve and retain faith on a lower level. To believe that there is a Listener at all. For as the situation grows more and more desperate, the grisly fears intrude. Are we only talking to ourselves in an empty universe? The silence is often so emphatic. And we have prayed so much already”

Spiritual Warfare

A senior demon writes: 'I once had a patient, a sound atheist, who used to read in the British Museum. One day, as he sat reading, I saw a train of thought in his mind beginning to go the wrong way ... If I had lost my head and begun to attempt a defence by argument I should have been undone. But I was not such a fool. I struck instantly at the part of the man which I had best under my control and suggested that it was just about time he had some lunch ... Once he was in the street the battle was won ... He is now safe in Our Father's (The Devil's) house.' (The Screwtape Letters)

Other Thoughts on Prayer

- “Relying on God has to begin all over again every day as if nothing had yet been done.”
- “It is much easier to pray for a bore than to go visit him.”
- “We had better share our bewilderments. By hiding them from each other we should not hide them from ourselves.”

Other Thoughts on Prayer

- “For most of us the prayer in Gethsemane is the only model. Removing mountains can wait.”
- “I sometimes pray not for self-knowledge in general but for just so much self knowledge at the moment as I can bear and use at the moment; the little daily dose.”
- “But the state of mind which desperate desire working on a strong imagination can manufacture is not faith in the Christian sense, it is a feat of psychological gymnastics.”

His Prayer Life

- Earthy realism
- Practical realism
- Natural, simple, unstructured attitude
- Supplicatory prayers for others
- Prayer as friendship with God
- Prayer-life is matured by suffering

A last word from “Jack”

“Prayer, in the sense of asking for things, is a small part of it; confession and penitence are its threshold, adoration its sanctuary, the presence and vision and enjoyment of God its bread and wine. In it God shows Himself to us. That he answers prayer is a corollary—not necessarily the most important one—from the revelation. What He does is learned from what He is.”