

# THE SCREWTAPE LETTERS

by C. S. LEWIS

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## Letter # 9

### “Discerning the Enemy’s Schemes During Our Spiritually Dry Times”

MY DEAR WORMWOOD,

(0) I hope my last letter has convinced you that the trough of dullness or "dryness" through which your patient is going at present will not, of itself, give you his soul, but needs to be properly exploited. What forms the exploitation should take I will now consider.

In the first place I have always found that the Trough periods of the human undulation provide excellent opportunity for all sensual temptations, particularly those of sex. This may surprise you, because, of course, there is more physical energy, and therefore more potential appetite, at the Peak periods; but you must remember that the powers of resistance are then also at their highest. The health and spirits which you want to use in producing lust can also, alas, be very easily used for work or play or thought or innocuous merriment.

(1) The attack has a much better chance of success when the man's whole inner world is drab and cold and empty. And it is also to be noted that the Trough sexuality is subtly different in quality from that of the Peak—much less likely to lead to the milk and water phenomenon which the humans call "being in love", much more easily drawn into perversions, much less contaminated by those generous and imaginative and even spiritual concomitants which often render human sexuality so disappointing.

(2) It is the same with other desires of the flesh. You are much more likely to make your man a sound drunkard by pressing drink on him as an anodyne when he is dull and weary than by encouraging him to use it as a means of merriment among his friends when he is happy and expansive. Never forget that when we are dealing with any pleasure in its healthy and normal and satisfying form, we are, in a sense, on the Enemy's ground. I know we have won many a soul through pleasure. All the same, it is His invention, not ours. He made the pleasures: all our research so far has not enabled us to produce one. All we can do is to encourage the humans to take the pleasures which our Enemy has produced, at times, or in ways, or in degrees, which He has forbidden. Hence we always try to work away from the natural condition of any pleasure to that in which it is least natural, least redolent of its Maker, and least pleasurable. An ever increasing craving for an ever diminishing pleasure is the formula. It is more certain; and it's better *style*. To get the man's soul and give him *nothing* in return—that is what really gladdens our Father's heart. And the troughs are the time for beginning the process.

(3) But there is an even better way of exploiting the Trough; I mean through the patient's own thoughts about it. As always, the first step is to keep knowledge out of his mind. Do not let him suspect the law of undulation. Let him assume that the first ardors of his conversion might have been expected to last, and ought to have lasted, forever, and that his present dryness is an equally permanent condition. Having once got this misconception well fixed in his head, you may then proceed in various ways. It all depends on whether your man is of the desponding type who can be tempted to despair, or of the wishful-thinking type who can be assured that all is well. The former type is getting rare among the humans. If your patient should happen to belong to it, everything is easy. You have only got to keep him out of the way of experienced Christians (an easy task now-a-days), to direct his attention to the appropriate passages in scripture, and then to set him to work on the desperate design of recovering his old feelings by sheer will-power, and the game is ours. If he is of the more hopeful type, your job is to make him acquiesce in the present low temperature of his spirit and gradually become content with it, persuading himself that it is not so low after all. In a week or two you will be making him doubt whether the first days of his Christianity were not, perhaps, a little excessive. Talk to him about "moderation in all things". If you can once get him to the point of thinking that "religion is all very well up to a point", you can feel quite happy about his soul. A moderated religion is as good for us as no religion at all—and more amusing.

(4) Another possibility is that of direct attack on his faith. When you have caused him to assume that the trough is permanent, can you not persuade him that "his religious phase" is just going to die away like all his previous phases? Of course there is no conceivable way of getting by reason from the proposition "I am losing interest in this" to the proposition "This is false". But, as I said before, it is jargon, not reason, you must rely on. The mere word *phase* will very likely do the trick. I assume that the creature has been through several of them before—they all have—and that he always feels superior and patronizing to the ones he has emerged from, not because he has really criticized them but simply because they are in the past. (You keep him well fed on hazy ideas of Progress and Development and the Historical Point of View, I trust, and give him lots of modern Biographies to read? The people in them are always emerging from Phases, aren't they?) You see the idea? Keep his mind off the plain antithesis between True and False. Nice shadowy expressions—"It was a phase"—"I've been through all that"—and don't forget the blessed word "Adolescent",

Your affectionate uncle  
SCREWTAPE

### Analysis Questions

1. In Paragraph 0, What Screwtape teaches Wormwood that during the low or dry periods of our spiritual life, there is great temptation as it relates to sensuality. This refers to temptations related to our senses. Do you agree or disagree? Have you experienced this?
2. In Paragraph 1, He specifically mentions temptations related to sex (this could include porn, etc.). Is this true? How does 2 Cor 5:7 apply? How does the "peak" temptation with sex differ than the "trough"? How does any trough paint our view of life and temptation while in them? How would Philipians 4:4-8 and Romans 8:28 help us avoid these in these times of trial?
3. In Paragraph 2, Screwtape reveals the strategy of succeeding in chronic excess pleasures by pushing the temptation during the trough times. How can we not be ignorant of the devil's schemes during these periods (2 Cor 2:11)?
4. In Paragraph 2, we learn that all pleasures were created by God and are used by Satan to cause us to sin through experiencing these in ways God has forbidden. What are some examples of these? What does the Bible tell us about the bankruptcy of enjoying His pleasures in sinful ways (Hebrews 11:25)?
5. In Paragraph 2, we learn that the *style* Screwtape seeks is to attack us in the troughs with the temptation that leads to increased cravings leading to diminished pleasures. Have you ever experienced this? What examples are there for this "formula" (drugs? Porn? Etc.)?
6. In Paragraph 3, what is the first line of offense for Screwtape? How do you relate with the understanding of the temporary nature of the first "ardors" of your conversion or some other previous high point in your spiritual walk?
7. In Paragraph 3, the theme is the present dryness. How do the various strategies presented in this paragraph connect with your type of personality? Are you an Eor / pity-party type of person or a wishful thinking optimist? Screwtape mentions that the former are rare? What geo-political factors would contribute to this thinking? Is it true today? How does each of these types present opportunities for Screwtape to bring temptation? Would you agree that Screwtape would actually encourage the desponding type to focus on Scripture (compare Matthew 4:6)?
8. In Paragraph 3, Screwtape encourages "moderation in all things". How does this relate to loving God with all our beings (Matthew 22:37; 1 Cor 16:15 KJV)? It is the goal of Screwtape to encourage a moderated religion. How does this compare with Jesus' comments in Revelation 3:16? Has Screwtape's strategy worked in your life?
9. In paragraph 4, what is the other strategy that Screwtape encourages? How does the idea of "phases" work against us while we are in our low points spiritually? Screwtape encourages "hazy" thinking. How will Matthew 4:4 and committing ourselves to a thorough Biblical worldview help in overcoming his strategies as found in this entire paragraph?