Screwtape Letter #9 – Questions

The "Law of Undulation" – continued. In the advanced trough lesson, Screwtape has even better ways to exploit them (us).

My dear Wormwood,
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. … 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.

9.1) Do you think Screwtape's statement, To get the man's soul and give him nothing in return—that is what really gladdens Our Father's heart is true or false?
Consider Satan's "gift" to Eve – what did he actually give Adam and Eve?

Consider Satan's "gift" to Jesus – what did he actually offer Him?

But there is an even better way of exploiting the trough; I mean through the patient's own thoughts about it. … 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.

9.2a) Screwtape tells Wormwood that, during his patient's dry spell, You have only got to keep him out of the way of experienced Christians. Why?

9.2b) What does Screwtape mean when he writes – A moderated religion is as good for us as no religion at all—and more amusing?

Another possibility is that of direct attack on his faith. … 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

9.3) Screwtape writes – Another possibility is that of direct attack on his faith. … 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.
Given that faith cannot be derived strictly from reason – and one cannot get from "losing interest" to "this is false" – what good is reason? Does it have value – or is it irrelevant?

Screwtape Letter #10 – Questions

Screwtape talks about "friends". Not the TV series – but the real people in our lives.

My dear Wormwood,
I was delighted to hear from Triptweeze that your patient has made some very desirable new acquaintances and that you seem to have used this event in a really promising manner. … That is the kind of betrayal you should specially encourage, because the man does not fully realise it himself; and by the time he does you will have made withdrawal difficult.

10.1) General discussion – talk about the friends we have / the things we do – how we can be influenced by them. The first parts of this paragraph relate to the times and events when the book was written. Today, it may be other things that could influence us. The important thing is – how do we relate to them? Especially, discuss the highlighted sentences.

No doubt he must very soon realise that his own faith is in direct opposition to the assumptions on which all the conversation of his new friends is based. … But if you play him well, they may become his. All mortals tend to turn into the thing they are pretending to be. This is elementary.

10.2) What happens when we first start to realize that "something isn't quite right" – that our new friends / activities / ?? don't really match up with what we believe?

Being silent when we shouldn't be – or laughing when we shouldn't – both are like double edged swords. It's bad for us – as C. S. Lewis points out, because it can lead us to the point where we actually start to believe what we're saying (or not saying).

The real question is how to prepare for the Enemy's counterattack.

The first thing is to delay as long as possible the moment at which he realises this new pleasure as a temptation. … By it we rescue annually thousands of humans from temperance, chastity, and sobriety of life.

10.3) Speaking of silence when "something isn't quite right" – that our new friends / activities / ?? don't really match up with what we believe. How does this fit in with the things you see in the world today? How does it compare with what's in the Bible? For starters – check out Matthew 6:19-24; Ecc 1:1-4 & 12:13-14; and look for the word "friends" in Proverbs.

Sooner or later, however, the real nature of his new friends must become clear to him, and then your tactics must depend on the patient's intelligence. If he is a big enough fool you … Finally, if all else fails, you can persuade him, in defiance of conscience, to continue the new acquaintance on the ground that he is, in some unspecified way, doing these people 'good' by the mere fact of drinking their cocktails and laughing at their jokes, and that to cease to do so would be 'priggish', 'intolerant', and (of course) 'Puritanical'.
Meanwhile … Her jealousy, and alarm, and his increasing evasiveness or rudeness, will be invaluable for the aggravation of the domestic tension

Your affectionate uncle

SCREWTAPE

10.4) What does Screwtape mean by saying Wormwood should get the patient to lead "two parallel lives?" What are some of the dangers of trying to do this?

Screwtape Letter #11 – Questions

Screwtape talks about "friends" in the previous letter.
Now, it's back to the patient himself.

My dear Wormwood,
Everything is clearly going very well. I am specially glad to hear that the two new friends have now made him acquainted with their whole set. … who without any spectacular crimes are progressing quietly and comfortably towards Our Father's house.

11.1) From last week's letter, we talked about the friends we have / the things we do – how we can be influenced by them. How are things going for the patient, compared to our discussion last week?

You speak of their being great laughers. … The point is worth some attention.
I divide the causes of human laughter into Joy, Fun, the Joke Proper, and Flippancy. You will see the first among friends and lovers reunited on the eve of a holiday. … Laughter of this kind does us no good and should always be discouraged. Besides, the phenomenon is of itself disgusting and a direct insult to the realism, dignity, and austerity of Hell.

11.2) Screwtape says that he does not know what the "real cause" of joy is. From John 15:5-11 and 16:19-24, what does the Bible says is the real cause of joy and how does that fit in with Screwtape's assumptions about joy?

Fun is closely related to Joy—a sort of emotional froth arising from the play instinct. It is very little use to us….it promotes charity, courage, contentment, and many other evils.
The real use of Jokes or Humour is in quite a different direction, … Cruelty is shameful—unless the cruel man can represent it as a practical joke. … Any suggestion that there might be too much of it can be represented to him as 'Puritanical' or as betraying a 'lack of humour'.

11.3) Even fun gets a bad name in Screwtape's view. What is it about fun & joy – and our choice of friends – that makes them inviting to Satan. And why do they start to stray from the intent of joy that is in the Bible?

But flippancy is the best of all. In the first place it is very economical. Only a clever human can make a real Joke about virtue, or indeed about anything else; any of them can be trained to talk as if virtue were funny. Among flippant people the Joke is always assumed to have been made. No one actually makes it; but every serious subject is discussed in a manner which implies that they have already found a ridiculous side to it. If prolonged, the habit of Flippancy builds up around a man the finest armour-plating against the Enemy that I know, and it is quite free from the dangers inherent in the other sources of laughter. It is a thousand miles away from joy: it deadens, instead of sharpening, the intellect; and it excites no affection between those who practise it.
Your affectionate uncle
SCREWTAPE

11.4) And finally, we get to flippancy – where there is no joy. How do we stray so far – what things influence this and keep us going down the path? And how can we get out of it. How can we help others get out of it?

Screwtape Letter #12 – Questions

Is there such a thing as things going too well?

My dear Wormwood,
Obviously you are making excellent progress. My only fear is lest in attempting to hurry the patient you awaken him to a sense of his real position. … He must not be allowed to suspect that he is now, however slowly, heading right away from the sun on a line which will carry him into the cold and dark of utmost space.
For this reason I am almost glad to hear that he is still a churchgoer and a communicant.
… And while he thinks that, we do not have to contend with the explicit repentance of a definite, fully recognised, sin, but only with his vague, though uneasy, feeling that he hasn't been doing very well lately.

12.1) This series of letters talk about the friends we have / the things we do – how we can be influenced by them. Why is it important for the patient to not realize his true place with his various friends? Also think about the song "What a friend we have in Jesus". Where is His friendship in all of this?

This dim uneasiness needs careful handling. If it gets too strong it may wake him up and spoil the whole game. On the other hand, if you suppress it entirely …He will want his prayers to be unreal, for he will dread nothing so much as effective contact with the Enemy. His aim will be to let sleeping worms lie.

12.2) Screwtape now gets into something he calls the "dim uneasiness". It's something he doesn't really understand – something he is a little worried about – something not under his control.
What is this "dim uneasiness"? (See John 14:15-17)

Why won't God let it die?

Why are we sometimes afraid of "it"?

As this condition becomes more fully established, you will be gradually freed from the tiresome business of providing Pleasures as temptations. … And Nothing is very strong: strong enough to steal away a man's best years not in sweet sins but in a dreary flickering of the mind over it knows not what and knows not why, in the gratification of curiosities so feeble that the man is only half aware of them, in drumming of fingers and kicking of heels, in whistling tunes that he does not like, or in the long, dim labyrinth of reveries that have not even lust or ambition to give them a relish, but which, once chance association has started them, the creature is too weak and fuddled to shake off.
12.3) Screwtape assumes that Wormwood will accomplish the suggestions he has given up to now. If he does – we see where Screwtape see this ending.
Screwtape talks about wasting time – and even reaching the point of wasting a life. Given that God probably won't let the "dim uneasiness" completely die out – is Screwtape's analysis necessarily a forgone conclusion? What does your answer mean to whether or not all that time is wasted?

You will say that these are very small sins; and doubtless, like all young tempters, you are anxious to be able to report spectacular wickedness. But do remember, the only thing that matters is the extent to which you separate the man from the Enemy. It does not matter how small the sins are provided that their cumulative effect is to edge the man away from the Light and out into the Nothing. Murder is no better than cards if cards can do the trick. Indeed the safest road to Hell is the gradual one—the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts.
Your affectionate uncle
SCREWTAPE

12.4) We tend to think of sin in terms of relativeness. It's like murder is worse than stealing and both are worse than gossip. Screwtape is afraid Wormwood may have the same idea. Why is Screwtape's statement in the final paragraph of this letter so dangerously true? Given that it's from Screwtape – which parts are untrue?