

Living With Hope in a Hopeless World--Learning from C. S. Lewis

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Abstract. Hope is a scarce commodity in the academy and in our secular world. Even though he faced strident opposition and bore up under many disappointments, C. S. Lewis maintained a deep sense of hope. His hope was grounded in his unwavering confidence in Christ. Because of Jesus, Lewis showed that we can look at even the worst things in life with an eternal perspective. We have hope. For Lewis, our hope in Christ and our future with Him in heaven affects every detail of our lives and our work as academics. Hope radically transformed Lewis's scholarship and his life, even in his darkest hours. As academics, we can learn from Lewis to live as persons of hope.

How important is hope in your daily life? How often do you think about the hope of spending eternity in the presence of Christ? What role does the hope of heaven play in your research, writing, and teaching?

Hope is not a common characteristic in our secular world—the world which Charles Taylor described as having no windows (how hopeless is that!). But sadly, we are also seeing a famine of hope in the Church. Hope is a particularly scarce commodity in the academy, including in my own life. When I walk out of church with my wife who is also an academic, often the first thing I say is something critical. She will protest, “Why are you so critical?” I respond, partly in jest, “But that’s what I get paid to do. As an academic my job is to spot inconsistencies, illogical arguments, flaws in a proposition.”

Among all the different followers of Jesus, I wonder if we academics might be the least likely to be marked by hope. When you think of the academic community, what is the one characteristic you think of first, (besides brilliance and intelligence, of course)? Cynicism. Too many of us are rather dour people, critical and pessimistic. To be sure, as Christian academicians, we must hone our critical thinking skills. But often in our emphasis on critical thinking, we are much heavier on the “critical” than we are on the “thinking” side of the equation.

This is why C. S. Lewis is so exceptional, along with all the other more well-known ways in which he was outstanding. Lewis was a man marked by hope, indeed by joyful hope. Yet when we consider Lewis’s life and circumstances, we see he had even more reason than most of us to be cynical, dour, and pessimistic.

Today we will look at how Lewis defined hope. We will explore why he had such a radiant and resilient hope, in spite of all his depressing circumstances. What difference did his hope make in his life and scholarship in real and practical terms? Then we close by briefly reflecting on how

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we as Christian academicians can cultivate that same hope. My intention is to let Lewis address the subject of hope primarily in his own words since he is rather the more capable of the two of us, with the hope that we can listen to him and learn from him in our own hopeless age.

1. How did Lewis define hope?

Hope was a major theme for Lewis. He directly rejected the popular saying that some people are so heavenly minded they are of no earthly good. In fact, he turned that saying on its head by declaring that unless you are sufficiently heavenly minded, you will definitely be of no earthly good. Here is how he does that.

In *Mere Christianity* Lewis classifies hope as a “theological virtue.” He then defines hope as “a continual looking forward to the eternal world.” He declares, “Aim at Heaven and you will get earth ‘thrown in’: aim at earth and you will get neither.” But he quickly assures us that Christian hope is by no means “escapism or wishful thinking, but one of the things a Christian is meant to do.”

In fact, Christian hope is not only opposed to escapism; it is just the opposite. Our hope, Lewis declared, serves as the reason why we don’t leave the world as we found it. He points out that the great Christian change-agents throughout history—he lists the apostles, missionaries, and those who fought slavery as his examples—were effective “precisely because their minds were occupied with Heaven.”¹

His point is that if you focus on the immediate, the thing in front of you, it eludes you. He illustrates this by pointing out that anyone who thinks constantly about their health will have all sorts of real or imagined maladies. He concludes by declaring, “we shall never save civilization as long as civilization is our main object. We must learn to want something else even more.”²

According to Lewis, the whole educational system trains us to be focused on this world instead of the next. So we have to untangle our this-world focus in order to develop the virtue of hope which focuses us on the next world, and which, in an amazing twist, makes us more effective in this world.³

Here is the balance. We practice gratitude and appreciation for the “earthly blessings” we have, but we must “never to mistake them for the something else of which they are only a kind of copy, or echo, or mirage.”⁴ The secret, Lewis says, is that we keep alive our desire for our “true country” which we “shall not find till after death.” He warns, “death; I must never let it get snowed under or turned aside; I must make it the main object of life to press on to that other country and to help others to do the same.”⁵

In his famous sermon *The Weight of Glory* Lewis clearly lists five “promises of Scripture” about our hope and heaven. “It is promised (1) that we shall be with Christ; (2) that we shall be like

¹ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, Touchstone ed. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1952), 134.

² *Ibid.*, 134-135.

³ Lewis, 135.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 137.

⁵ *Ibid.*

Him; (3) with an enormous wealth of imagery, that we shall have ‘glory’; (4) that we shall, in some sense, be fed or feasted or entertained; and (5) that we shall have some sort of official position in the universe—ruling cities, judging angels, being pillars of God’s temple.”⁶ Lewis then proceeds to unpack these five promises which comprise the “weight of glory” we receive.

2. What was the source of Lewis’s hope? Why did he have such a radiant and resilient hope?

His hope was grounded in an unwavering confidence in Christ and the truthfulness of the Word of God. Because of Jesus, Lewis showed that we can look at even the worst things in life with an eternal perspective. Indeed, our eternal hope gives us our perspective.

His prayer life sustained his hope

Lewis was many things, but he was definitely a man whose life was given to prayer. It is tempting to view Lewis’s stellar career as a scholar at Oxford and Cambridge as idyllic, dreamy good. But he was definitely not living in paradise. He was repeatedly rejected for the promotion he rightfully should have had at Oxford as the leading authority in his field. He was treated with contempt and dismissive sneers because of his vocal allegiance to Christ. As if his professional life didn’t produce pressure enough, his life at home was marked with non-stop quarreling and conflicts with Mrs. Moore and her daughter whom he had taken in to his home in fulfillment of a promise to his college buddy who was killed in World War One.

Lewis’s response to all these tribulations? He turned to prayer. Prayer was the norm for him throughout every day. After studying Lewis’s walk with God, Dorsett observed that “prayer became absolutely essential for him to keep that relationship with God strong.”⁷

Once James Dundas-Grant, a military officer who lived at Magdalen for a while during the war asked Lewis how he whiled away his time on a slow train ride across the country, “‘Oh, I say my prayers,’ he replied without any hesitation, as if nothing were more natural.”⁸

Lewis’s good friend George Sayers who observed him closely for years commented that “He liked to arrive very early at Oxford station, to walk up and down the platform saying his prayers,....”⁹ When Lewis was on vacation with the Sayers, after a long day’s hike, he would go to his room and “read in the Bible, in any translation which I had put by his bed, and say his prayers. He found this the best time of day for religious devotions.”¹⁰

In his correspondence and speaking he repeatedly urged believers to pray. In one letter he provided some wise counsel after an initial disclaimer, “I very much doubt if I’m good enough at prayer myself to advise others. First thing in the morning and the last thing at night are good times but I don’t find that they are the best times for one’s main prayers. I prefer sometime in

⁶ C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*, Touchstone Simon & Schuster 1975 ed. (Originally published New York: MacMillan, 1949), 31.

⁷ Lyle W. Dorsett, *Seeking the Secret Place : The Spiritual Formation of C.S. Lewis* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos Press, 2004), 37.

⁸ *Remembering C. S. Lewis--Recollections of Those Who Knew Him*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), 372.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 332.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 335.

early evening, before one has got sleepy—but of course it depends on how your day is mapped out.”¹¹

For Lewis prayer—ongoing communion with God—was integral to his walk with Christ. Sherwood Wirt, writing an article for Billy Graham’s *Decision* magazine, asked Lewis about his view of “the daily discipline of the Christian life—the need for taking time to be alone with God.” Lewis responded: “We have our New Testament regimental orders upon the subject. I would take it for granted that everyone who becomes a Christian would undertake this practice. It is enjoined upon us by Our Lord; and since they are His commands, I believe in following them. It is always just possible that Jesus Christ meant what He said when He told us to seek the secret place and close the door.”¹²

Hope and the focus on heaven motivated Lewis to pray. Even though his life was packed and pressured, he spent much time in prayer.

His hope was grounded in his theology

Lewis’s hope was in Christ and the future in heaven God has prepared for us. Heaven was a favorite theme of Lewis’s and it appears over and over in his writing on a variety of subjects.

For him, the hope of being in heaven in God’s presence was real, vital, enervating, personal. In *The Problem of Pain* he declared,

For it is not humanity in the abstract that is to be saved, but you—you, the individual reader, John Stubbs or Janet Smith. Blessed and fortunate creature, your eyes shall behold Him and not another’s. All that you are, sins apart, is destined, if you will let God have His good way, to utter satisfaction....Your place in heaven will seem to be made for you and you alone, because you were made for it—made for it stitch by stitch as a glove is made for a hand.¹³

Lewis believed that everything that really counts about earth is related to heaven. In the preface to *The Great Divorce* Lewis claims that “Earth, I think, will not be found by anyone to be in the end a very distinct place. I think earth, if chosen instead of Heaven, will turn out to have been, all along, only a region in Hell: and earth, if put second to Heaven, to have been from the beginning a part of Heaven itself.”¹⁴

He reaffirms this point later in *The Great Divorce* when the Teacher says, “Heaven is not a state of mind. Heaven is reality itself. All that is fully real is Heavenly. For all that can be shaken will be shaken and only the unshakeable remains.”¹⁵

¹¹ C. S. Lewis and Walter Hooper, *The Collected Letters of C.S. Lewis*, 1st ed., 3 vols. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2004), 2:826.

¹² Dorsett, 65.

¹³ C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: MacMillan, 1962), 147-148.

¹⁴ *The Great Divorce*, in *The Best of C. S. Lewis* (Washington, D.C.: Canon Press, 1969), 112.

¹⁵ *The Great Divorce*, chapter 9, *ibid.*, 154.

For Lewis, hope means understanding that the real world is heaven and everything on earth finds meaning as it relates to heaven. This is why hope is so central for him, in a way that I have seen in no other Christian scholar in any era.

For Lewis, I believe, hope was both cause and effect. Because of his hope, he prayed and because he prayed so consistently, his hope remained strong.

He underscored this theme with the upside-down logic of *The Screwtape Letters* when Screwtape instructs Wormwood, “The truth is that the Enemy, having oddly destined these mere animals to life in His own eternal world, has guarded them pretty effectively from the danger of feeling at home anywhere else. That is why we must often wish long life to our patients; seventy years is not a day too much for the difficult task of unravelling their souls from Heaven and building up a for attachment to the earth.”¹⁶

Part of the reason why Lewis put so much stock in heaven and our future there is that he recognized that only there will we be truly what we were created to be. In *The Problem of Pain* he rhapsodized about the hope of becoming complete.

To enter heaven is to become more human than you ever succeeded in being in earth; to enter hell, is to be banished from humanity. What is cast (or casts itself) into hell is not a man: it is ‘remains.’ To be a complete man means to have the passions obedient to the will and the will offered to God:....heaven is the home of humanity and therefore contains all that is implied in a glorified human life: but hell was not made for men. It is in no sense *parallel* to heaven:...¹⁷

His hope was always God-centered. In one lecture Lewis simply states that the best thing about heaven is “the vision and enjoyment of God.”¹⁸ That is the essence of our hope.

In fact, for Lewis, hope meant a full realization of God’s love as well as the love he had for others here on earth. In the closing paragraphs of *The Four Loves*, he explained

When we see the face of God we shall know that we have always known it. He has been a party to, has made, sustained and moved moment by moment within, all our earthly experiences of innocent love. All that was true love in them was, even on earth, far more His than ours, and ours only because His. In Heaven there will be no anguish and no duty of turning away from our earthly Beloveds. First, because we shall have turned already; from the portraits to the Original, from the rivulets to the Fountain, from the creatures He made loveable to Love Himself. But secondly, because we shall find them all in Him. By loving Him more than them we shall love them more than we now do.¹⁹

Perhaps one of the most winsome characteristics of Lewis was his own childlike exuberance of hope—his overwhelming, bursting-out eagerness to be in the presence of God. One of the many

¹⁶ C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, Kindle 2014 ed. (New York: The Macmillan company, 1944), 144.

¹⁷ *The Problem of Pain*, chapter 8: 125, 127.

¹⁸ "Transposition" in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*, 83.

¹⁹ *The Four Loves* (New York: Harcourt, 1960), Chapter 6, "Charity," 139.

times he expressed this was in the final chapter of *Letters to Malcolm*. Lewis speculates about our future glorification. (Let these words reignite in your heart a freshness of hope, a vivid eagerness to be in the presence of Jesus.)

Then the new earth and sky, the same yet not the same as these, will rise in us as we have risen in Christ. And once again, after who knows what eons of the silence and the dark, the birds will sing and the waters will flow, and lights and shadows move across the hills, and the faces of our friends laugh upon us with amazed recognition.

Guesses, of course, only guesses. If they are not true, something better will be. For “we know that we shall be made like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.”²⁰

3. What difference did hope make for Lewis?

Our hope in Christ and our future with Him in heaven should affect every detail of our lives and certainly our work as academics. Hope radically transformed Lewis's scholarship and his life. Lewis's life gives abundant evidence of his determination to “press on to that other country” as he put it, and he definitely invested his life and writing in helping “others to do the same.”²¹

Looking forward, not back

Lewis was propelled by his hope in his future life with God. It was a part of his daily life. On June 28, 1963, not too many months before he died that November, he wrote these words in a letter to a friend, Mary Willis Shelburne. “Think of yourself just as a seed patiently waiting in the earth: waiting to come up a flower in the Gardener's good time, up into the *real* world, the real waking. I suppose that our whole present life, looked back on from there, will seem only a drowsy half-waking. We are here in the land of dreams. But cock-crow is coming. It is nearer now than when I began this letter.”²²

Obedience to Christ the Judge and Savior

His hope motivated Lewis to obey Christ. He earnestly sought an unapologetic, undiluted total obedience to God in all things. Lyle Dorsett says that Lewis practiced “radical obedience to everything that the Lord Jesus required, regardless of how small or mundane it seemed.”²³

In his sermon, “The Weight of Glory,” Lewis used a fascinating phrase about our progress in faith as it relates to hope. He said, “Longing transforms obedience, as gradually as the tide lifts a grounded ship.”²⁴

Lewis explained that much of his motivation for stressing the importance of obedience was the prospect of standing before God the Judge. What an awesome, even terrifying prospect. The

²⁰ *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer*, 1st American ed. (New York.: Harcourt, 1964), ch. 22, page 124.

²¹ I have written two other articles on Lewis, particularly on his conversion, ““Kicking and Struggling: C. S. Lewis, The Dejected, Reluctant Convert,” and one on his walk with God, “Mere Christianity is Not Casual Christianity.” Both these articles are available at <https://www.leadershipanvil.org/resources>.

²² Lewis and Hooper, Volume III, page 1434.

²³ Dorsett, 111.

²⁴ Lewis, *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*, 27.

Church of the 21st century doesn't spend much time talking about God as our Judge. But for Lewis, contemplating the moment when we will stand before the Judgement Seat of God brought sobriety and focus, obedience and faith. Listen to how Lewis described this in "The Weight of Glory."

In the end that Face which is the delight or the terror of the universe must be turned upon each of us either with one expression or with the other, either conferring glory inexpressible or inflicting shame that can never be cured or disguised....It is written that we shall "stand before" Him, shall appear, shall be inspected. The promise of glory is the promise, almost incredible and only possible by the work of Christ, that some of us, that any of us who really chooses, shall actually survive that examination, shall find approval, shall please God. To please God ... to be a real ingredient in the divine happiness ... to be loved by God, not merely pitied, but delighted in as an artist delights in his work or a father in a son—it seems impossible, a weight or burden of glory which our thoughts can hardly sustain. But so it is.²⁵

Earlier in this sermon Lewis mentions the claim that for Christians to hope for heaven is like they are being bribed. He responds,

Those who have attained everlasting life in the vision of God doubtless know very well that it is no mere bribe, but the very consummation of their earthly discipleship; but we who have not yet attained it cannot know this in the same way, and cannot even begin to know it at all except by continuing to obey and finding the first reward of our obedience in our increasing power to desire the ultimate reward.²⁶

Lewis was thrilled with the prospect of the glory we will see. He said, "fame with God, approval or (I might say) 'appreciation by God'" is an amazing thing to contemplate. Just imagine what it will be like "when the redeemed soul, beyond all hope and nearly beyond belief, learns at last that she has pleased Him who she was created to please."²⁷ He continues, "Glory means good report with God, acceptance by God, response, acknowledgement, and welcome into the heart of things. The door on which we have been knocking all our lives will open at last."²⁸

Putting Earth's Joys and Pains in Perspective

One of Lewis's secrets to his outlook on life was that he viewed problems and even pain and grief in the context of God's larger plan for humankind. In other words, he viewed life and particularly our pain and suffering through the lens of his hope. Of course, he would bring this up in *The Problem of Pain*.

The Christian doctrine of suffering explains, I believe, a very curious fact about the world we live in. The settled happiness and security which we all desire, God withholds from us by the very nature of the world: but joy, pleasure, and merriment He has scattered broadcast. We are never safe, but we have plenty of fun, and some ecstasy. It is not hard

²⁵ "The Weight of Glory" in *ibid.*, 34.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 27.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 33.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 36.

to see why. The security we crave would teach us to rest our hearts in this world and oppose an obstacle to our return to God: a few moments of happy love, a landscape, a symphony, a merry meeting with our friends, a bathe or a football match, have no such tendency. Our Father refreshes us on the journey with some pleasant inns, but will not encourage us to mistake them for home.²⁹

Lewis was able to keep this perspective because he was constantly aware of the temptation to view this world as our real home. He warns us in *The Weight of Glory*,

And you and I have need of the strongest spell that can be found to wake us from the evil enchantment of worldliness which has been laid upon us for nearly a hundred years. Almost our whole education has been directed to silencing this shy, persistent, inner voice; almost all our modern philosophies have been devised to convince us that the good of man is to be found on this earth....When they want to convince you that earth is your home,....They begin by trying to convince you that earth can be made into heaven, thus giving a sop to your sense of exile on earth as it is.³⁰

Pain and problems can make us long for heaven; or to put it another way, pain and problems can prompt us to grow in our hope. In his autobiographical account *Surprised by Joy* Lewis laconically reflects on his awful experience at boarding school, "Life at a vile boarding school is in this way a good preparation for the Christian life, that it teaches one to live by hope."³¹

Zest for life

Many who met Lewis were immediately struck by his hearty laughter and by his love of life. Lewis loved life, because he had hope. His approach to life seems to be summed up in his declaration, "Because we love something else more than this world, we love even this world better than those who know no other."³²

Worship

In his *Letters to Malcolm*, which he wrote in the spring of 1963 before he died in November, he remembers back to how he learned to worship and adore God in prayer with the simple rule, "Begin where you are." He would thank God for the brook, the moss, whatever he could see, as an introduction to praise. "I have tried,...to make every pleasure into a channel of adoration."³³ He closes his thoughts of praise and adoration by asserting, "Joy is the serious business of heaven."³⁴ And we could add, hope is "the serious business of heaven" as well.

Evangelism

²⁹ Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 115.

³⁰ "The Weight of Glory" in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*, 29.

³¹ *Surprised by Joy--the Shape of My Early Life* (New York: Harcourt, 1955), 36.

³² *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1970), "Some Thoughts," 150.

³³ *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer*, 88-89.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 93.

His hope in the next world spurred on his evangelism, making him a “hot-gospeler” as he called himself.³⁵ If our hope is truly for the next world, then surely we should make it a priority to tell others, so they too can have this hope.

He would “quote with approval General Booth’s remark to Kipling: ‘Young man, if I could win one soul for God by playing the tambourine with my toes, I’d do it.’” John Wain, who often heard Lewis make this statement, reflected, “Lewis did plenty of playing the tambourine with his toes, to the distress of some of the refined souls by whom he was surrounded at Oxford.”³⁶

In a talk he gave to Anglican priests and youth workers entitled “Christian Apologetics,” he made a strong case that “our present task is chiefly to convert and instruct infidels.”³⁷ In his essay “Christianity and Culture” he declared, “The glory of God, and, as our only mean to glorifying Him, the salvation of human souls, is the real business of life.”³⁸

Facing death

When it was clear he was near death, he was prepared to die. His brother Warren said, “Jack faced the prospect [of death] bravely and calmly. ‘I have done all I wanted to do and I’m ready to go,’ he said one evening.”³⁹ He was a man at peace, because of his hope.

His hope in looking forward to heaven was very real for Lewis. He thought about it. He talked about it with others. He lived with this as a reality. In one of his *Letters to an American Lady* he wrote, on June 7, 1959,

What a state we have got into when we can’t say “I’ll be happy when God calls me” without being afraid one will be thought “morbid.” After all, St. Paul said just the same. If we really believe what we say we believe—if we really think that home is elsewhere and that this life is a “wandering to find home,” why should we not look forward to the arrival. There are, aren’t there, only three things we can do about death: to desire it, to fear it, or to ignore it. The third alternative, which is the one the modern world calls “healthy” is surely the most uneasy and precarious of all.⁴⁰

Our hope in Christ and our future with Him in heaven affects every detail of our lives and our work as academics. Hope radically transformed Lewis's scholarship and his life, even in his darkest hours of grief when his wife Joy died.

When his wife Joy died, Lewis gained a deeper perspective on our hope and our understanding of what happens to us after death. In his poignant *A Grief Observed* he ruminated about the change she went through at death and he grappled with what faith and hope mean in the face of

³⁵ Roger Lancelyn Green and Walter Hooper, *C. S. Lewis: A Biography*, Rev. 2002 ed. (London: HarperCollins, 1974), 340.

³⁶ *Remembering C. S. Lewis--Recollections of Those Who Knew Him*, 153.

³⁷ Lewis, *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, 94.

³⁸ C. S. Lewis and Walter Hooper, *The Business of Heaven: Daily Readings from C.S. Lewis*, 1st American ed. (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984), 224.

³⁹ Green and Hooper, 431.

⁴⁰ C. S. Lewis, *Letters to an American Lady* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1997), 83-84.

losing one so dear. But gradually he gained a perspective on what hope means even in the midst of grief. He writes of his departed wife,

And then, of her, and of every created thing I praise, I should say, ‘In some way, in its unique way, like Him who made it.’

Thus up from the garden to the Gardener, from the sword to the Smith. To the life-giving Life and the Beauty that makes beautiful.

‘She is in God’s hands.’ That gains a new energy when I think of her as a sword. Perhaps the earthly life I shared with her was only part of the tempering. Now perhaps He grasps the hilt; weighs the new weapon; makes lightnings with it in the air. ‘A right Jerusalem blade.’⁴¹

So, for Lewis, a key ingredient in our hope is understanding that our life on earth is preparation for the next life, life with God if we have surrendered to His will. That hope truly gives us perspective, even in the face of death.

Appropriately enough, Lewis concluded his classic *Chronicles of Narnia* with one final statement about hope. Peter, Edmund, and Lucy are amazed to see their parents waving at them “across the great, deep valley.” They think Aslan is about to send them back to England from Narnia. Aslan commented that they didn’t look as happy as he meant them to be.

Lucy said, “We’re so afraid of being sent away, Aslan. And you have sent us back into our own world so often.”

“No fear of that,” said Aslan. “Have you not guessed?”

Their hearts leaped and a wild hope [there’s that word again] rose within them.

“There *was* a real railway accident,” said Aslan softly. “Your father and mother and all of you are—as you used to call it in the Shadowlands—dead. The term is over: the holidays have begun. The dream is ended: this is the morning.”

And as He spoke He no longer looked to them like a lion; but the things that began to happen after that were so great and beautiful that I cannot write them. And for us this is the end of all stories, and we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after. But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story, which no one on earth has read: which goes on forever: in which every chapter is better than the one before.⁴²

⁴¹ *A Grief Observed*, 1st HarperCollins pbk. ed. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994), ch. 4, pages 80-81.

⁴² *The Last Battle, Chronicles of Narnia*, Collier Books ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1956), chapter 16, pages 183-184.

That radical re-description of death captures the essence of Lewis's hope. Death, even with its pain and separation, is a good thing when viewed from heaven's perspective.

4. How should hope shape our lives?

Today we have a lot of mushiness about hope and the afterlife, even and especially in the church. Lewis said he suspected "that our conception of Heaven as *merely* a state of mind is not unconnected with the fact that the specifically Christian virtue of Hope has in our time grown so languid."⁴³

We can benefit from Lewis's example in several ways which are basic to Christian discipleship. But in particular, our hope should motivate us to be more faithful in praying. In the depressing decline of Western civilization, Lewis's example of "looking forward to the eternal world" can provide a much-needed boost of faith and perspective in our own dark days, by anticipating an eternity in the presence of God.

"Looking forward to the eternal world" should mean we become more like Christ in a host of ways. It might mean we are more willing to speak the truth of a Christian worldview boldly and graciously in a cancel culture of Christophobia. It might mean we are more willing to share the Good News with unbelieving colleagues who don't even believe there is an "eternal world," in spite of the fact that it might cost us academic promotions, as it did Lewis. It might mean we address individuals ensnared in various politically correct sins because we love them so much we don't want them to miss enjoying the bliss of the eternal world.

Lewis's vibrant heavenward hope challenges us to make sure we are teaching and writing from the perspective of the eternal world. His student, Harry Blamires captured the pedagogical ramifications of this hope best in his classic, *The Christian Mind* as he challenges us to examine to see if we are living with a deep, daily, practical awareness of the Christian mindset and the enormous implications it brings.

The Christian mind's realization that all is not over when you die is something which affects not only the future but the present. To believe that men will be called to account for each wrong committed and each good committed is itself enough to give an urgency to human deliberations and decisions which the secular mind cannot sense....On the one hand is the assumption that all is over when you die....On the other hand is the almost crushing awareness of a spiritual war tearing at the heart of the universe, pushing its ruthless way into the lives of men--stabbing at you now, now, now, in the impulses and choices of every waking moment; the belief that the thoughts and actions of every hour are moulding a soul which is on its way to eternity; that we are choosing every moment of our lives in obedience or disobedience to the God who created and sustains all that is; that we are always responsible, always at war, always involved in what is spiritual and deathless; that we are committing ourselves with every breath to salvation or damnation.

Do we, as Christians, mentally inhabit the world presented to us by the faith of the Church as the real world? Do we mentally inhabit a world with a Heaven above it and a

⁴³ Miracles, chapter 16, para. 31, in *The Best of C. S. Lewis*, 360.

Hell beneath it; a world in which man is called to live daily, hourly, in contact with the God whom neither time nor space can limit? Do we, as Christians, mentally inhabit an order of being which is superior to decay and death?....

Do we bring this kind of picture of the human situation to bear upon our discussion of human affairs, allowing it to determine our contribution to the secular activities in which we are involved? Do we, in this respect, think Christianly? The truth is that for the most part we don't....In short we ensure that there shall be no vigorous Christian mind helping to determine the character of contemporary culture.⁴⁴

Or, as Lewis expressed it, “Because we love something else more than this world, we love even this world better than those who know no other.”⁴⁵ “Aim at Heaven and you will get earth ‘thrown in’: aim at earth and you will get neither.”⁴⁶ Brothers and sisters, as theologians, we of all people must aim at heaven!

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⁴⁴ Blamires 75, 76.

⁴⁵ Lewis, *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, "Some Thoughts," 150.

⁴⁶ *Mere Christianity*, 134.