

**Mere Christianity Is Not Casual Christianity—  
How C. S. Lewis Walked with God**  
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We all want to be like Jesus. And as we follow Him, somehow it helps to have people who exemplify what it looks like to follow Him and to become like Him. I know it is possible to live a Christlike life because I've been blessed to know several people who truly lived like Jesus. So if anyone ever says, "Nobody can live a holy life," I know better because I've known some—very well—who do. Today I want to talk to you a man I didn't know personally but who makes a good model of following Jesus, especially for those of us in the academy.

Walter Hooper, an American, met C. S. Lewis just months before he died but became his assistant and friend and later wrote one of the best biographies of him. Hooper (Lewis 1970, p. 12) said, "Lewis struck me as the most thoroughly *converted* man I had ever met." Erik Routley, an undergraduate at Magdalen, the Oxford college where Lewis taught for years, heard him preach his now-famous sermon, "The Weight of Glory". Although he only met Lewis two or three times, Routley recalled years later that, when listening to him, one felt that "here was a man who had been laid hold of by Christ and who enjoyed it." (*Remembering C. S. Lewis--Recollections of Those Who Knew Him*, 2005, p. 106)

For years I have admired C. S. Lewis as one of the great apologists of the twentieth-century. I have been inspired and challenged and deepened by his writings. I read through the Chronicles of Narnia twice with my kids when they were small and Teri and I have read through them again a couple of times in recent years. I admired him as a scholar, as a professor at Oxford and then Cambridge, as a widely-read and published expert, as a superb writer—his books have sold around 200 million in 30-some languages, and as a creative mind—all in all, as a really smart and brilliant guy.

But somehow (I think I got my first copy of *Mere Christianity* around 1969) I hadn't realized what an incredibly godly man he was, how spiritual he was, how intensely serious he was about his walk with God, how dramatically he was transformed by the living Christ.

A few years ago Teri and I were in Oxford and Cambridge presenting papers at the C. S. Lewis Foundation's Oxbridge conference. There I came to see Lewis more as a fellow believer, a real human being—with warts and foibles and failures to be sure, but also as a believer who followed close to Jesus. We met people who knew him. We were in his home, the Kilns. We went to many of his familiar haunts. In all of this, I was struck by how little I knew about his deep level of discipleship and obedience.

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## C. S. Lewis and the Fruit of the Spirit

So today, we won't consider his influence, his scholarship, his apologetics or his academic career—others have already done that far better than I could. I'm not going to give an overview of his life--that can easily be found elsewhere. Instead, I'd like to look at how his conversion so radically changed him, how he carefully and faithfully practiced the spiritual disciplines and how his life exhibited the transforming power of Christ through the fruit of the Spirit.<sup>1</sup>

Now he certainly didn't start out as a man you would nominate as exhibiting the fruit of the Spirit. Alan Jacobs in his excellent biography *The Narnian* points out that “Jack Lewis in his middle teens was a thoroughly obnoxious, arrogant, condescending intellectual prig.” (Jacobs, 2005, p. 58) There is some evidence that pre-conversion he struggled with sadomasochistic tendencies. (Jacobs, 2005, p. 56) “Once he went to a party and got sufficiently drunk that he offered to pay a shilling to anyone who would let him whip them—a shilling a lash, that is, which could have exhausted his allowance rather quickly.” (Jacobs, 2005, p. 66)

While he was a student at Oxford, he took in the mother of his good friend and Oxford roommate Paddy Moore who was killed in battle, because they had promised one another that if either of them were killed in the war—World War I, the one who survived would look after the parent of the other. So after Paddy's death in 1918, Lewis took responsibility for Mrs. Moore. Initially they apparently had a something of a mother-son relationship which was understandable since Lewis's own mother to whom he was very close died when he was only nine years old.

But it developed into a weird or quirky relationship, one of the strangest and most secretive parts of his life. He actually never talked about it, even to his own brother Warren who was his lifelong close companion. Most biographers tend to sidestep making any final judgment on the exact “nature” of their relationship. But from the comments of Lewis's father, Albert, his brother Warren and other close friends, it seems they shared an intimate relationship in those early years though Mrs. Moore was, as Albert said, “old enough to be his mother [and] separated from her husband.” (Jacobs, 2005, p. 93)

It's important to note however that after his conversion there were never any charges of impropriety even though they still resided under the same roof. But by then apparently the relationship had settled back into a mother-son arrangement which became increasingly burdensome for Lewis as we will see. All of this to say, Lewis was a sinner and acted like one.

On top of this weird relationship he was known as arrogant and self-centered. When he started as a junior member of the faculty at Oxford, he was proud and combative. In 1926 the unconverted Lewis wrote this comment in his diary after he first met the man who would soon be his best friend, J. R. R. Tolkien: “He is a smooth, pale, fluent little chap...No harm in him: only needs a smack or two.” This arrogance and dismissive attitude is in spite of the fact that Tolkien

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<sup>1</sup> For a fuller exploration of Lewis's conversion, see Daryl McCarthy, “Kicking and Struggling: C. S. Lewis, The Dejected, Reluctant Convert,” 2022. Available at <https://www.leadershipanvil.org/resources>.

had already established himself as a recognized scholar and was six years Lewis's senior. (Jacobs, 2005, p. 139)

But after spending his youth professing atheism, he slowly and reluctantly became a convinced theist in 1929. Then he was truly transformed by his encounter with Christ in September 1931 after years of intense dialogue with close Christian friends like Tolkien and Hugo Dyson. And once committed, there was no turning back. Christ had all of him and he wanted all of Christ.

After observing Tolkien, Dyson, Charles Williams and others before his conversion, it was only natural that Lewis (Root, p. 190) would say, "What we practice, not (save at rare intervals) what we preach, is usually our great contribution to the conversion of others."

So, let's take a look at Lewis's walk with God.

### **The Fruit of the Spirit is...Love**

One evidence of Lewis's love for God was his devotion to prayer and his intentionality, conversing with God. Lewis never learned to drive. So Clifford Morris was his driver. Clifford said (Dorsett p. 42) Lewis "was one of the most prayerful men he had ever known." Lewis would say on the drive to Cambridge sometimes, "Morris, I'm sorry I can't talk for a quarter of an hour. I need to do my prayers."

Morris describes one day when he came to pick Lewis up in the car, Lewis was pacing back and forth in the drive (Como, pg. 326-327), "his eyes upon the ground, utterly oblivious to anything that was going on around him. I sat in the car and waited for a moment or two, and then he looked up and saw me. He came straight to the car, and as he got in, he apologized for keeping me waiting and then said, very simply, 'I was just saying my prayers.' He told me afterward that he often prayed in this fashion, while walking or waiting anywhere;...."

**Lewis loved God through his praying.**

**Ponder: How can I make prayer a more integral part of my day, like Lewis did?**

**Lewis also loved God through his faithful attendance at worship services.** After his conversion to theism but even before his conversion to Christ, Hooper (1974, p. 103) says Lewis "began attending his college chapel on weekdays and his parish church on Sundays—and this despite his distaste for the 'public' aspect of church-going and his more intense dislike of organ music" which he once described to Walter Hooper as "one long roar." "He also began reading St. John's Gospel in Greek, thus initiating a practice he was to continue for the rest of his life: to read some portion of the Bible almost every day." Lewis (Dorsett (2004, p. 65) had "virtually memorized" many portions of the King James Version by the late 1940s.

In spite of the many things Lewis did not like about the church, Richard W. Ladborough (Como, pg. 197-198), one of his colleagues at Cambridge, observed that "the chapel was the centre of his life in college. He daily attended weekday matins at eight o'clock,....he hated

hymn singing, and his unconsciously agonized face often showed his distaste when we did the singing....He was orthodox in belief but seemed to have little sense of the Church....little interest in ritual.” Alan Jacobs says that Lewis “certainly knew the entire Psalter by heart.” (Jacobs, 2005, p. 239) So Lewis showed his love for God by his devotion to worship, even when it conflicted with his personal tastes and preferences.

**Another evidence of his love for God and love for others was his deep commitment to evangelism.** In fact, it is widely accepted that one of the major reasons he was never offered a chair at Oxford, in spite of his preeminent qualifications, was that the other professors thought he was, as one person said (Hooper, p. 340) “so committed to what he himself called ‘hot-gospelling’” that he would not be a good professor.

Indeed, Lewis (Como p. 153) would “quote with approval General Booth’s remark to [Rudyard] Kipling: ‘Young man, if I could win one soul for God by playing the tambourine with my toes, I’d do it.’”

In a talk he gave to Anglican priests and youth workers entitled “Christian Apologetics,” (*God in the Dock* p. 94) he made a strong case that “our present task is chiefly to convert and instruct infidels.”

In another talk he gave to theology students on “Modern Theology and Biblical Criticism” he warned, “Woe to you if you do not evangelize.”

In his essay “Christianity and Culture” (*Business of Heaven* p. 224) he flatly declared, “The glory of God, and, as our only means to glorifying Him, the salvation of human souls, is the real business of life.”

C. S. Lewis loved God and the fruit of this love shaped his life.

## **The Fruit of the Spirit is...Patience**

Patience is closely related to peace and was a fruit of the Spirit which God chose to sovereignly work into Lewis’s life through the many difficulties he had to face. After all, doesn’t Scripture remind us in the old King James (Romans 5:3), “Tribulation worketh patience.” Well, Lewis had plenty of “tribulations.”

### **Patience in the face of ostracism at Magdalen College**

For many of us, the thought of spending your adult life as a professor at Oxford and then at Cambridge, teaching and writing books and hanging out in the pub with your friends seems idyllic. But in reality, Lewis’s life was quite difficult and very trying.

After he became known as a follower of Jesus at Oxford, he was ostracized by many of his colleagues. In spite of the fact that he taught at Magdalen at Oxford from 1925 until 1954—29 years—and in spite of the fact that he was widely recognized as one of the top scholars in his field, he was never offered a Chair at Oxford until after he had accepted the Chair of Medieval and Renaissance Literature at Cambridge, late in his career. In 1947 when his friend Tolkien

was trying to marshal support for Lewis to fill the Chair of English, he said he was taken by the “extraordinary animosity” on the part of the English Faculty. (McGrath, 2013, p. 243) His colleagues disdained his forays into writing about theology as well as his writing for a popular audience. Writing for children was the unforgivable sin.

Lewis was rejected several times for promotions that his scholarship should have earned him. McGrath observes that “Lewis had no doubt that he was regarded by many of his academic colleagues with suspicion or derision. He seemed to be a prophet without honour in his own city and university.” (McGrath, 2013, p. 244)

Years later an old man who had been a fellow at Magdalen when Lewis was there declared that Lewis was “the most evil man he had ever met.” When questioned, he explained that the basis for his judgment was that Lewis “believed in God and used his ‘cleverness to corrupt the young.’” (McGrath, 2013, p. 244)

So Lewis experienced rejection after rejection and open, ongoing animosity from his colleagues with whom he worked and ate and lived each day. Just before he moved to Cambridge he refers in a letter to some kind of “crisis” in the Faculty of English at Oxford that tempted him “to hatred many times a day.” (McGrath, 2013, p. 309) That was a tribulation.

**Ponder: Think about a time when you experienced rejection in the academy. How did you respond?**

#### **Patience in spite of troubles at home.**

Another source of tribulation came from Mrs. Moore, the mother of his college roommate he had taken in while he was still a student. Over the years whatever intimacy, love or comradeship they had shared dissolved and she became a cantankerous domineering woman who remained in Lewis’s home, along with her daughter, Maureen, until her death in 1951. Mrs. Moore ran the house and treated Lewis (Hooper 2002, p. 291) like “an extra maid” as she once referred to him.

On one occasion when Moore was confined to bed, Lewis wrote, “I am so domestically tied (to the bedside of an elderly invalid) that I can never be sure of being able to leave Oxford.” On another occasion “Lewis wrote to a friend who had reproached him for not replying promptly to a letter, ‘Dog’s stools and human vomit have made my day today: one of those days when you feel at 11 A.M. that it really must be 3 P.M.’” In a few weeks Lewis collapsed and was hospitalized for strep throat. But in truth he was exhausted. “His doctor was concerned about stress to his heart.” (Jacobs, 2005, pp. xiv-xv)

Hours after Mrs. Moore died, his brother Warren wrote, “In the last fifteen years of her reign, I don’t think I ever saw J work more than half an hour without the cry of ‘Baw-boys’ [her nickname for Jack]—COMING, dear!’, down would go the pen, and he would be away perhaps five minutes, perhaps half an hour; possibly to do nothing more important than stand by the kitchen range as scullery maid. Then another spell of work, then the same thing all over again: and these were the conditions under which...all his books were produced.” (Jacobs, 2005, p. 98)

Even when he was invited to Lambeth Palace for an important meeting with church leaders, he had to write in reply, “I never know when I can, even for a day, get away from my duties as a nurse and a domestic servant (there are psychological as well as material difficulties in my house).”

In a letter to his pen pal Mrs. Van Deusen in 1951 reflecting on his life, (Dorsett, p. 154), he admitted, “Strictly between ourselves, I have lived most of it...in a house which was hardly ever at peace for 24 hours, amid senseless wranglings, lyings, backbiting, follies, and tears. I never went home without a feeling of terror as to what appalling situation might have developed in my absence.”

### **Learning Patience at Home**

Don Giovanni, one of his favorite correspondents, (Giovanni was an Italian priest who spoke no English, so they corresponded totally in Latin) wrote, urging him to do more writing. Lewis (*Letters* vol. II, p. 905-906) explained, “I labour under many difficulties. My house is unquiet and devastated by women’s quarrels....My aged mother [Mrs. Moore], worn out by long infirmity, is my daily care. Pray for me, Father, that I ever bear in mind that profoundly true maxim: ‘If you wish to bring others to peace, keep thyself in peace.’” He went on to say, “These things I write not as complaints but lest you should believe I am writing books. If it shall please God that I shall write more books, blessed be He. If it shall not please Him, again, blessed be He. Perhaps it will be the most wholesome thing for my soul that I lose both fame and skill lest I were to fall into that evil disease, vainglory.”

Unfortunately, Lewis was to face more stress in the near future after this letter because of his own dear brother, Warren, his closest friend and companion throughout his life. Warren (Hooper 2002, 304) was struggling once again with alcoholism—a lifelong struggle--and had to be put into a nursing home. Afterwards Warren (Hooper 2002, p. 304) wrote in his diary that after all of his struggle with “insomnia—drugs—depression—spirits—illness,” Jack’s “kindness remains unabated....” Ironically it was after all this that Lewis once again began pouring forth many of the volumes that are still blessing us today.

Late in life, in September 1956, Lewis quietly married an American divorcee, Joy Davidman Gresham so she could be treated for her cancer in England without going back to America. Joy had two sons. Her son Douglas Gresham (2005, p. 41) later reminisced, “Jack found himself not only a student, but also a domestic servant, a handyman, carpet layer, occasional carpenter, removalist (every time they moved from one residence to another it was Jack who did the hard work), assistant cook, and so forth. Amazingly, he was able to put his practical skills into a wide variety of tasks while still keeping up with his academic pursuits, and all this without complaint or resentment.”

You can see that even under trying and painful circumstances Lewis bore the fruit of patience as well as the humility that is an integral part of patience.

**Ponder: What are some things that test your patience? How do you respond? How should you respond?**

## **The Fruit of the Spirit is...Kindness**

One of the most common testimonials by those who knew him was that C. S. Lewis was a kind man. He exhibited this in many ways but especially in his deep concern for serving others. He did this first of all, by simply paying attention to others. Each individual with whom he engaged had his full attention. Cuneo (2005, p. 35) observed that "...Lewis demonstrated by action what transpires when one human being treats another with attention." CHB 88:35

We observed earlier that Lewis was not naturally kind. So, no surprise, the converted Lewis had to rein in his natural tendencies. His massive knowledge, his keen debating skills, his sharpness of insight and his mere strength of presence could easily overwhelm the timid and sometimes the not-so-timid.

### **No Ordinary People**

Even though Lewis was not naturally kind, his conversion at least brought more kindness into his life. Much of the time, he truly lived out what he had declared in his famous sermon, "Weight of Glory" which he preached at St. Mary the Virgin University Church in June 1941, (the same church where John Wesley preached some of his famous sermons) (Lewis 1975, p. 39) when he declared, "There are no *ordinary* people. You have never talked to a mere mortal."

Lewis himself actually treated people like they were important. Derek Brewer who was tutored by Lewis and became a medieval scholar observed that "many of his pupils became teachers of one sort or another and all, or most of them, became his friends." (Jacobs, 2005, p. 163)

### **Kindness in the classroom**

Lewis's lecture style would certainly not make you think he would get close to his students. The *Time* magazine cover article featuring Lewis on September 8, 1947 began with this description of Lewis's lecture.

"The lecturer, a short [this was inaccurate because Lewis was a big man standing at 5 feet 11 inches tall], thickset man with a ruddy face and a big voice, was coming to the end of his talk. Gathering up his notes and books, he tucked his horn-rimmed spectacles into the pocket of his tweed jacket and picked up his mortarboard. Still talking—to the accompaniment of occasional appreciative laughs and squeals from his audience—he leaned over to return the watch he had borrowed from a student in the front row. As he ended his final sentence, he stepped off the platform. The maneuver gained him a head start on the rush of students down the center aisle. Once in the street, he strode rapidly—his black gown billowing behind his gray flannel trousers—to the nearest pub for a pint of ale."

He had begun the class in the same manner by launching his lecture as he walked through the door. Yet his fellow Oxford lecturer Gervase Mathew (Como p. 190) asserts, "But always he forged a personal link with those who heard him."

Erik Routley (Como, p. 110) said, “I think this was his great secret. He hated casual contacts: human contact must, for him, be serious and concentrated and attentive, or else it was better avoided. It might be for a moment only; but that was its invariable quality....If ever there was a man who exploded the slander that ‘academic’ means remote, dull and inhuman, that man was Lewis.”

He possessed a remarkable ability to recognize and applaud the good things that happened in the lives of others, another mark of kindness. Just weeks before he died he exhibited this graciousness when an old friend Maureen Blake, whom he had known since she was a girl, came to see him in the hospital after his heart attack. Maureen herself had recently experienced a remarkable change of circumstances. After “decades as a music teacher” she unexpectedly inherited the estate and title of a distant relative by the amazing name of Sir George Cospatrick Duff-Sutherland-Dunbar, or more simply Baron Dunbar of Hempriggs. Jacobs tells the story best.

When she [Maureen] arrived at the hospital she was told that Lewis had not recognized any of his visitors that day. She entered quietly, clasped his hand, and said, “Jack, it’s Maureen.” “No,” he replied—unsurprisingly, given his condition. But he added, “It’s Lady Dunbar of Hempriggs.” Maureen was stunned: “Oh Jack, how could you remember that?” “On the contrary,” he murmured. “How could *I* forget a fairy-tale?” (Jacobs, 2005, p. 303)

### **Kindness to the stranger**

Another mark of his kindness was that he was quick to respond to the needs of others. In his brother’s “Memoir of C. S. Lewis” Warren (Christian History 2005, p. 4) recalls,

One summer day he heard it mentioned casually that there was a sick man in a field some distance away. Jack said, ‘poor devil’ and continued to write; then he suddenly jumped up in distress and said, ‘I have sinned; I have shown myself to be lacking in all charity.’ Out he went, found the man, brought him back to the house, gave him a drink, heard his story, and then—being satisfied that the man was able to look after himself—saw him off, not (I am sure) forgetting the Samaritan’s two-pence.

### **Kindness to colleagues**

Lewis consistently served others, even in academic settings which are, especially in England, hierarchical and status-conscious. Richard W. Ladborough (Como, p. 195), reminisced that when Lewis began teaching at Cambridge at Magdalene College, “he was technically its Junior Fellow, whose customary duty it is to fill the glasses of his colleagues. We tried to absolve our illustrious new professor from performing this menial task, but characteristically, he would not allow us.”

Dorsett (2004, p. 118) notes, “Lewis was always an encourager: He affirmed his many correspondents’ dignity and promised to pray for many of them on a daily basis.” Phrases like,



“I will certainly put you in my prayers...you are all in my prayers” were frequently mentioned in his letters.

Through his regular talks on BBC he was already famous all across the United Kingdom—his voice was probably one of the most recognizable across the British Isles. (This was the origin of his book *Mere Christianity*.) But his picture on the cover of *Time* magazine in 1947 was what really spread his fame across to America. Now his books were being sold and read internationally. Consequently, he started receiving bags and bags of letters. His commitment to personally answer the thousands of letters he received from all over the world, mostly from total strangers, came from his kindness, a commitment to treat each person with respect and with dignity.

He told Arthur his best friend, “it was a duty to answer fully” letters from “serious inquirers.” In the 1950’s he wrote 138 letters to a woman in America who simply complained non-stop about her family. Lewis admitted to a friend that she was “a very silly, tiresome, and probably disagreeable woman.” But he explained that he felt he should continue writing to her because he also knew she was “old, poor, sick, lonely, and miserable.” (Jacobs, 2005, p. 225)

As we’ve already seen, Lewis was very committed to prayer and worship, but he was quick to point out in *Mere Christianity* (Lewis 1943, Bk. IV, ch. 7, p 163) that there may be times as you are seeking to become more like Christ that “you may realize that, instead of saying your prayers, you ought to be downstairs writing a letter, or helping your wife to wash up. Well, go and do it.” In same vein in his *Letters to Malcolm* (1963, p. 66), he admitted, “I am often, I believe, praying for others when I should be doing things for them. It’s so much easier to pray for a bore than to go and see him.”

In a letter to Don Giovanni the day before Easter, March 27, 1948, he (*Letters* vol. II, p. 844) reflected, “In the poor man who knocks at my door, in my ailing mother, in the young man who seeks my advice, the Lord Himself is present: therefore let us wash His feet.”

### **Kindness through generosity**

Another mark of Lewis’s kindness was that he was a generous man though this did not come naturally for him. According to George Sayer (Trexler (2005, p. 2), Lewis inherited his father’s ‘fear of being bankrupt’ and both father and son were ‘inept in the investment of money.’”

But Lewis gave all the money he got from his religious writings to charities. He told Hooper (2002, p. 236), “I felt that God had been so gracious in having me that the least I could do was give back all the money made in His service.” It is estimated that 90 percent of Lewis’s income went to charity. He (Hooper 2002, p. 237) set up a charitable trust, the Agape Fund, which gave away two-thirds of all his royalties to help the poor. He gave away so much he sometimes didn’t have much left with which to pay his taxes.

Once when Hooper (2002, p. 296) and Lewis were walking down St. Giles Street in Oxford, Lewis stopped to give money to a beggar. Hooper asked if he wasn’t afraid the man would spend it on drink. CSL “Well, if I kept it, I would.” His rule was “When in doubt, give.”

His lifelong friend, Austin Farrer (Como p. 385) describes Lewis.

His characteristic attitude to people in general was one of consideration and respect. He did his best for them, and he appreciated them. He paid you the compliment of attending to your words. He did not pretend to read your heart. He was endlessly generous. He gave without stint, to all who seemed to care for them, the riches of his mind and the effort of his wit; and where there was need, he gave his money.....When he had entered into any relationship, his patience and his loyalty were inexhaustible. He really was a Christian—by which I mean, he never thought he had the right to stop.

**Ponder: What are some ways you can serve those near you in ways that you are not doing now—fellow-students, professors, friends, family members?**

### **The Fruit of the Spirit is...Gentleness or Meekness**

If any professional guild is known for ego and pride, it is the academy. Actually, most professional groups struggle with a sense of elitism. In truth, most nations, ethnic groups, families and even churches, mission groups and denominations carry a sense of superiority. It seems to be the natural condition of our fallen nature to assume that whatever *we're* a part of is the best.

In contrast to this sense of superiority is the fruit of the Spirit known as “gentleness” or, in older English, “meekness.” This virtue seems to be sadly missing from many circles and individuals today. So it’s always refreshing to be confronted with authentic meekness or humility. None of us likes the kind of pride that masquerades as humility, the kind Charles Dickens’ character Uriah Heep so grossly displayed. But true, honest humility is disarming and often surprising.

Amazingly enough, as a well-known academic and as a brilliant, world-famous author, Lewis was genuinely humble, meek, gentle. Testimonies abound recounting the humility and gentleness of Lewis, this mental giant with a photographic memory who could easily overwhelm anyone he chose in debate or conversation. [their game of testing Lewis to remember where quotes are found]. And all this in Oxford which, as Alan Bede Griffiths (Como, p. 77) observes, “is not a place that encourages humility,....”

### **Recognizing the dangers of pride and conceit**

Lewis was keenly aware of the dangers of pride and conceit. Thus, he was transparent in admitting areas of weakness or lack of knowledge. In his *Letters to Malcolm* (Lewis 1963, p. 101) he bluntly admits in a section on communion, “I am not good enough at Theology. I have nothing to offer. Hiding any light I think I’ve got under a bushel is not my besetting sin! I am much more prone to prattle unseasonably.” Later he (Lewis 1963, p. 102) reiterates that on this subject, “I have nothing to offer.”

In a letter to Edward T. Dell (Hooper, 2004, vol. II, p. 941, from May 26, 1949) about sanctification he admits, “I’m not qualified to give the guidance you need. These things I need

to learn, not teach.” In another letter (Dorsett, 2004, p. 124), he similarly states, “I v. much doubt if I’m good enough at prayer myself to advise others.”

### **Killing pride**

After Lewis became a theist but had not yet become a follower of Christ, he underwent months in which he was being convicted of his sins by the Holy Spirit. Lewis was keenly aware of the threat of pride. Here is what he wrote to Arthur Greeves, his good friend from childhood, on Jan 30, 1930:

*I have found out ludicrous and terrible things about my own character. Sitting by, watching the rising thoughts to break their necks as they pop up, one learns to know the sort of thoughts that do come. And, will you believe it, one out of every three is a thought of self-admiration: when everything fails, having had its neck broken, up comes the thought, ‘What an admirable fellow I am to have broken their necks!’ I catch myself posturing before the mirror, so to speak, all day long. I pretend I am carefully thinking out what to say to the next pupil (for his good, of course) and then suddenly realize I am really thinking how frightfully clever I’m going to be and how he will admire me...And then when you force yourself to stop it, you admire yourself for doing that. It’s like fighting the hydra...There seems to be no end to it. Depth after depth of self-love and self-admiration. Lewis Letters I:878)*

Lewis did not make flattering or trivial comments. But he was quick to express credit to others. In a famous debate before the Socratic Club at Oxford in 1948 he was bested by a younger philosopher, Elizabeth Anscombe. He corrected his argument after this debate and maintained his friendship with her. Later he commented to another friend, “Of course, she is far more intelligent than either of us.” (Jacobs, 2005, p. 233)

Even as the gifted communicator that he was, he (Hooper 2002, p. 244) was realistic or humble enough to realize that he wasn’t always successful. “I’ve given some talks to the R.A.F. at Abingdon already and as far as I can judge they were a complete failure....One must take comfort in remembering that God used an ass to convert the prophet.”

Even after he had gained worldwide fame, Ladborough (Como, p. 194, 197) said of Lewis, “The one author he was usually silent about was himself....No man was less given to name-dropping, and no one was ever less of a snob....Ecclesiastical gossip, indeed gossip about people at all, was completely foreign to him. More often than not he would make a point of sitting next to the most junior person in the room. He was interested in ideas and things, though, when pressed, his judgment of character was sharp and penetrating...*He was too shy to appear to want to be known and too modest to think that they wanted to know him.*” [italics added]

Leo Baker (Como, p. 67), a friend of Lewis’s from their days as students at Oxford says there was a rift in their relationship, “a breach for several years.” Eventually, Lewis wrote and apologized, saying he hoped to “to pick up some of the old links.” In his letter Lewis (Hooper, 2004, Vol. II, p. 161) straightforwardly asks, “Will you forgive me?” That is meekness.

Hooper (2002, p. 105) reports that late in Lewis's life he asked Lewis what he thought about his growing fame. Lewis answered, "One cannot be too careful *not* to think of it!" He seemed to honestly think his fame was a passing fad.

Morris (Como, p. 328), his driver told Lewis that he thought it was too bad he didn't preach more often. "He told me one day that after he had delivered a sermon and had received the kind words and congratulations of all and sundry—as always happened when he spoke in public—he began to think what a jolly fine and clever fellow Jack Lewis was, and, said he, 'I had to get to my knees pretty quickly to kill the deadly sin of pride!'"

Owen Barfield (Como, p. 236) his close friend, observed, "I never recall a single remark, a single word or silence, a single look, the lightest flicker of an eyelid or...alteration in the pitch of his voice, which would go to suggest that he felt his opinion entitled to more respect than that of old friends he was talking with..." just because he was a famous author.

This humility was evident in all of his relationships. Chad Walsh (Hooper 2002, p. 178) who sometimes attended the gathering of the Inklings at the Lamb and Flag described Lewis as "racing his friends to refill empty mugs" and he "was as good a listener as talker, and has alert curiosity about almost anything conceivable."

Well, meekness is a word that isn't popular in our self-esteem, hyper-success, mega-impact church world. But how winsome, how refreshing, how biblical, how like Jesus.

## **Becoming more like Jesus**

C. S. Lewis provides an example for believers in general and for Christian academicians in particular to follow. Lewis invested his life in seeking to become more like Jesus. As he once commented (Goffar 1995, p. 660), "...what will really influence them, for good or ill, is not anything I do or say but what I *am*."

## **Inventory on Our Walk with God**

As academicians, how do we measure up to his standards, which are really the biblical standards of godliness and holiness?

If you've been following Jesus for a while, you've probably realized it is much easier to *think* about how to live like a Christian than to actually live like Jesus. We all have enough fallenness in us to produce a gap between our beliefs and our actions. But if Lewis could do better than that, then you and I can too! Lewis's life has forced me to ask myself several sobering questions—and I don't like some of the answers I've had to face.

- Do I treat others with respect and courtesy?
- Do I listen to others, even those without graduate degrees and those from whom I have nothing to gain?
- Do I look for opportunities to serve?
- Am I generous in meeting the needs of others and of God's Kingdom?
- Have I totally irrevocably signed over the control of my life to Christ?
- Am I spending time every day in God's Word?

- Am I daily mentally engaging in prayer, conversing with God?
- Am I willing to evangelize even at the risk of being ostracized by my colleagues?
- Am I sensitive and kind, looking out for the needs of others?
- Is my life marked by a gentle humility that prefers others over myself?
- How do I handle being mistreated or treated like a servant?
- Am I faithful in attending public worship?

In short, am I thoroughly converted, as was C. S. Lewis? The breadth of his influence and the depth of his insight came from the intimacy of his walk with God. May God help us to be transformed by the renewing of our minds and conformed to the character of our Lord Jesus Christ.

### Discussion

1. What surprises did you learn about Lewis? What are 2 things you learned about Lewis that you didn't know before?
2. What are two things you struggle with as you seek to follow Christ in the academy?

### Recommended Reading on Lewis's Life and His Walk with God

- Dorsett, Lyle W. *Seeking the Secret Place: The Spiritual Formation of C. S. Lewis*
- Green, Roger Lancelyn, and Walter Hooper. *C. S. Lewis: A Biography*
- Jacobs, Alan. *The Narnian: The Life and Imagination of C. S. Lewis*
- Daryl McCarthy, "Kicking and Struggling: C. S. Lewis, The Dejected, Reluctant Convert," 2022. Available at <https://www.leadershipanvil.org/resources>.
- McCarthy, Daryl. "Living With Hope in a Hopeless World: Learning from C. S. Lewis." 2022. Available at <https://www.leadershipanvil.org/resources>.
- Sayer, George, *Jack: A Life of C. S. Lewis*
- C. S. Lewis Foundation, [www.cslewis.org](http://www.cslewis.org)
- C. S. Lewis Institute, [http://www.cslewisinstitute.org/Articles\\_About\\_CS\\_Lewis](http://www.cslewisinstitute.org/Articles_About_CS_Lewis)

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