

Welcome to Dr. Kerry Irish's study guide of C. S. Lewis' *Mere Christianity*. This study guide is unique in that it begins with an introduction that explains how *Mere Christianity* came into being, and also how Lewis became a Christian.

I have divided *Mere Christianity* into six discussions. Each of the discussions is labeled according to the Book and Chapters it includes. I did not use page numbers as there are many editions of *Mere Christianity* each with its own pagination system. However, my study guide retains the four books and chapter titles that Lewis used. The chapters are all about four to six pages long so finding the answers to the study questions should not be too hard.

May the God who pursued C.S. Lewis bless your study.

## **Introduction:**

### **C.S. Lewis: Reluctant Convert**

*The unfolding of your words gives light;  
It gives understanding to the simple.* Psalm 119:130

It is August, 1941 London, England. Great Britain has been at war against Nazi Germany and the Italian Empire for nearly two years. The British people stand virtually alone against the greatest combined aggressive power the world has ever seen. These stalwart people have survived the fall of France and Germany's attempted invasion of England itself the previous year. In that autumn of 1940, their young men answered the siren call, ran to their aircraft, and flew into the clouds to face the overwhelming numbers of the German air force. Almost miraculously these few hundred men saved the British Empire, and perhaps the world, as they traded their blood for time, time for Great Britain to arm and respond to Adolf Hitler's attempt to rule Europe. Now in August, it appeared the Germans were about to destroy the Soviet Union. The British people watched helplessly as Hitler's panzers roared over the western reaches of the USSR. Many Englishmen wondered what was happening to their world. A religious people in those days, questions of faith came to mind. But often the answers, so easily accepted in the halcyon days of the British Empire, seemed lackluster, even inadequate, in the face of so much death and destruction. The administrators of the British Broadcasting Corporation, the BBC, decided to use their airwaves to lift spirits. One of the most important topics in this endeavor was faith, the Christian faith. And so, a series of radio talks was proposed, but who would give them. The Archbishop of Canterbury? No, too denominational. Britain was no longer all Anglican. The talks must not be divisive, but unifying. Surely someone could be found who spoke to all Christians, indeed to all of England - Christian or not. And so on August 6, 1941, a Wednesday as it happened, at 7:45 in the evening a new voice came clearly and strongly over the BBC. The speaker spoke of Christianity, the specific topic that evening was common decency. The title of the whole series of four talks was "Right and Wrong: A Clue to the Meaning of the Universe." The speaker made no effort to convert anyone to Christianity that night, he merely set out to explain that there is a moral law, that human beings disobey it, and that the existence of the lawgiver is very probable. The new unfamiliar voice was that of an Oxford professor of Medieval

English Literature (Geoffrey Chaucer, John Lydgate, and the rest of the “boys in the band”). The professor's chats were very well received and more were arranged. Three years later, when he finished these intermittent talks, C.S. Lewis was famous. In 1952 he edited all of his wartime monologues and published them in one volume. Those radio talks had purposefully distilled Christianity to its essence according to the insights and remarkable intelligence of one man. And so the title of the new book was meant to suggest that on its pages one could find Mere Christianity. Mere not in the sense of something light or simple, but rather at its essence, no denominational trappings, no extra baggage.

Clive Staples Lewis, affectionately known as “Jack” to his friends, was born in the winter of 1898 in unhappy Belfast of Protestant Northern Ireland. His father Albert was a successful lawyer and his mother Florence was the daughter of a Church of Ireland clergyman.

The emerald landscape of Ireland fascinated the young Lewis and deeply influenced his powerful imagination. The Lewis family lived in a large house in which stacks and piles and shelves of books had preeminence of place if not order. Lewis loved to read and the books of mythology, romance, and poetry were favorite pastimes. By the age of seven, he was a solitary little boy with few friends who found most of his pleasure in books. In 1905 his older brother by two years, Warren, called Warnie, was sent off to boarding school. Jack missed Warnie and this loneliness only sent young Lewis deeper into his books.

About this time Jack had an experience that would shape much of his intellectual life. While walking in the garden one day, the scent of a flowering currant bush triggered a memory of a pleasant time in a former house. The sense of longing, of desire to return to that happy moment, overwhelmed him, and then it slipped away. In the coming days the experience of joy, of longing, would repeat itself with different stimuli. Ultimately it was the experience of this illusory, fleeting joy that would lead Lewis to think carefully as to why this experience had occurred and what it meant. Once the sensation of joy had passed, a sense of loss, a notion that something was amiss, prevailed. These two emotions together, a fleeting joy linked to a subsequent sadness suggested that the world of men was not what it should be, that a more perfect world somehow lay beyond or behind this earthly existence. One familiar with Plato's philosophy can well make the connection between the young Lewis and the Greek sage. For Plato, citing Socrates, taught that the world we experience is not the “real” world but only an inexact and changing representation of the unseen greater reality that does not change – the so-called Theory of Forms.

So the young Lewis was deeply influenced by a love books, the verdant and mysterious countryside of northern Ireland, and the sense that joy in this life was rare, much to be desired, and perhaps more attainable, more perfect in some other realm. Then tragedy further shaped the boy. In early 1908 Flora Lewis was diagnosed with stomach cancer. Though only forty-five years old, she died in August. Albert was devastated and did not respond well to the needs of his two sons. Lewis wrote, “With my mother's death all settled happiness, all that was tranquil and reliable, disappeared from my life

<sup>1</sup> Just two weeks after the death of his mother, Jack was sent to Wynyard boarding school in England. Understandably, given the timing of his arrival, the boy hated Wynyard; and later the man, unable to master his anger, referred to it as “Belsen” after the notorious Nazi concentration camp of the Second World War.

Fortunately, Lewis’s period of purgatory at Wynyard lasted but two years. His father finally agreed to transfer him to Cherbourg School in the spa town of Great Malvern. While studying there Lewis recognized that he was gradually losing his Christian faith. Perhaps foremost among the reasons for this rising doubt was that scholars of the classics, the books that were the core of his studies, discounted the pagan faith of their subjects as “illusions.” Lewis wondered if Virgil’s (Roman writer of the first century BC) faith was mere self-deception, what differentiated that from the faith of Christians recent and ancient? Eventually he reasoned that religion was a natural development, “a kind of endemic nonsense into which humanity tended to blunder.”<sup>2</sup> After graduating from Cherbourg School, Lewis studied under William Kirkpatrick who had also tutored Warnie for Sandhurst, England’s military academy.

It was September 1914 when Lewis arrived at Great Bookham to study under Kirkpatrick. That summer the world changed. The assassination of Franz Ferdinand, the heir to the throne of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and his wife Sophie was the match that lit the tinderbox of the European alliance systems. The Great War, now known as World War One, began in August. Great Britain and France stood shoulder to shoulder against the invading horde of Germans on the fields of northeastern France.

Meanwhile, it did not take long for Kirkpatrick to begin molding the bright mind of the young Lewis. The old schoolmaster met him at the train station the day he arrived. As they walked to Kirkpatrick’s home, Lewis observed that the scenery was surprisingly wild. Kirkpatrick, perhaps instinctively, launched into his Socratic teaching method. What did Lewis mean by “wildness”? Why would he have already formed an expectation that he should be surprised? Had he read books on the topic? Lewis, mildly chagrined, conceded he had no basis for his view. Kirkpatrick then intoned that the young man should have formed no opinion, having no facts. Within hours of his arrival at Great Bookham, Kirkpatrick had Lewis studying Greek, then came Latin and eventually German and Italian. Lewis flourished under Kirkpatrick’s stern tutelage. Unfortunately, Kirkpatrick’s own atheism only confirmed Lewis’s new disdain for the Christian faith. The one aspect of his psychological makeup that disturbed his atheism was the aforementioned concept of joy. Where did this desire for joy come from? What rational source gave it life and purpose? This wonderful emotion came to him full force while reading George MacDonald’s novel *Phantastes*. MacDonald’s enchanting fantasy stirred Lewis mind as nothing else had. Reading *Phantastes* had provided him a wonderful “Bright Shadow” whose enchanting song beckoned from some distant place. “That night,” Lewis wrote, “my imagination was in a certain sense baptized.”<sup>3</sup>

By 1916 the Great War was well into its second year of carnage. Lewis realized that serving in the British military, however reluctantly, was probably inevitable. He would be eighteen in November. Meanwhile, his intellectual gifts had made an impression on Kirkpatrick, and young Lewis had decided that Oxford was the place that would enable the full maturation of his talents and interests. University College at Oxford offered a scholarship. But the war intervened. No student could attend Oxford if he qualified to serve in the armed forces. The one caveat was to enroll in Oxford

University's Officer Training Corps. Lewis enrolled in April 1917. But it would be misleading to suggest his studies began at that time. His actual purpose was to matriculate through the officer training course.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, his time in the program lasted but a few days. In early May, he was transferred to E Company, No. 4 Officer Cadet Battalion, happily stationed at Keble College, Oxford.

In E Company, the socially reticent Lewis formed important albeit brief friendships with four other young men. He wrote, "I remember five of us at Keble, and I am the only survivor."<sup>5</sup> The most important of the four was Andrew Moore whose death permanently impacted Jack's life. Even before their sojourn to France and deployment on the front lines, Moore and Lewis made a pact that should one of them be killed and the other survive, the latter would look after the family of the fallen. And even before young Moore's death, Jack had formed an unusual attachment to his friend's forty-five-year-old mother, Mrs. Jane Moore. Mrs. Moore had recently separated from her husband.

In November 1917, 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant C.S. Lewis crossed the English Channel to France and disembarked at Le Havre in Normandy. He was posted to the 1<sup>st</sup> Somerset Light Infantry. That regiment was ensconced in the trenches east of the French town of Arras near the Belgian border. Early in the morning of April 14, 1917, the Somerset LI launched itself against the German held village of Riez du Vinage. The assault went well, but took most of the day. By evening Lewis could count about sixty German prisoners stumbling from their hovels with their hands above their heads. Apparently, no one among the Somersets anticipated the almost predictable German counter attack. Both in this war and the next, the Germans delighted counterattacking a recently lost position. Now German guns shelled the village, and an infantry attack rapidly followed. Lewis was standing near sergeant Harry Ayres when the big shells exploded. Ayres went down mortally wounded and Lewis too was hit. He was evacuated to a Red Cross hospital near Etaples. For C.S. Lewis the war was over; but the experience had changed his life.

He was sent home to England to convalesce at London's Endsleigh Palace Hospital in May 1918. Mrs. Moore moved to London to be near him. Their relationship, confirmed by the pact that Lewis had made with Andrew Moore, now blossomed into something uniquely romantic and psychologically complex.<sup>6</sup> In January 1919, Jack returned to Oxford and the studies the Great War had so abruptly interrupted.

Lewis loved Oxford and all that it stood for. Somewhat romantically, he saw the great university's home as a "Beautiful city that encouraged and affirmed the empires of the mind."<sup>7</sup> Lewis's Oxford was,

A Clean, sweet city lulled by ancient streams,  
A place of vision and of loosening chains,  
A refuge of the elect, a tower of dreams.<sup>8</sup>

And this place of fantasy, of redemption, and learning was best understood and even preserved through a study of the classics, one of the source springs of the river of western civilization, the writings of ancient Greece and Rome. For Lewis and his colleagues, along with most of England's ruling elite, this kind of education, known as the *Literae Humaniores*, was the true jewel of Victorian England's crown. The Latin title may be translated "more humane letters." The phrase suggests an educational philosophy that opens the student's mind, civilizes his world view, enlarges his perspective, and

inculcates an appreciation for the past, and by implication, other cultures and places. In short, it purposes a humanist view of life and service to one's fellow man. This education was remarkable in its ability to form a common world view for Britain's political and commercial elite. And though one may have supposed it would lead to anti-Christian and anti-imperial philosophies and policies, it had the opposite effect. Indeed, Christianity and the *Literae Humaniores* in Great Britain were the twin pillars of empire. An Oxford education then, was not preparation for a job, it was preparation for a life worth living, and a future role in ensuring England's survival and prosperity.<sup>9</sup>

Lewis' undergraduate career was exemplary, encouraging his ambition to become an Oxford Don. In 1921 he won the distinguished Chancellor's Essay prize, the award for the best undergraduate English essay. Lewis graduated the next year with a "first" in his field, classical literature. However, there were no job prospects and his adviser, philosophy professor Edgar Carritt, suggested he study another year in English literature thus making him more marketable. Achieving a first in a new field in one year was a formidable task. But Jack accomplished the goal though he exhausted himself in the process. Through his entire academic sojourn, Mrs. Moore made herself the "lodestar of his (Jack) family life."<sup>10</sup>

Lewis's study of English literature led to one of the foundations of his philosophical world view. At Oxford, the dons viewed English literature through the prism of historical, textual and philological (Philology: the study of language in written sources) questions. At Cambridge, the faculty preferred a more theoretical treatment, subjecting texts to scientific literary criticism.<sup>11</sup> Lewis fiercely maintained the former view throughout his life and his classic *Preface to Paradise Lost* on John Milton's great allegorical poem is a good example of his thought. About the same time, new friend Owen Barfield compelled Lewis to make another momentous change in his basic philosophy. It is fair to say that educated twentieth-century people tend to believe that human beings of their time have an innately superior view of life relative to those of bygone ages. Lewis later called this position "chronological snobbery."<sup>12</sup> As important was Lewis's acceptance of the modern scientific view that the physical universe, as understood through human senses, was the most basic form of reality. The problem with the latter point of view is that it does not offer solutions to essential human questions such as what constitutes morality, beauty, or most importantly for Lewis, the emotion of joy. And once the modern inquisitor realizes the significance of these questions, and the fact that the ancients did indeed attempt to address these mysteries, the concept of chronological superiority just becomes a hollow chronological snobbery as Lewis eventually called it.

All of this meant that Lewis was losing his atheism in the same way he had lost his Christian faith – reasoning based on philosophy and history. Lewis struggled manfully for years to hold god at bay.<sup>13</sup>

Meanwhile, he finished his studies in English literature in 1923 with a hard earned first. His aggregate academic record now included a first in Classical Moderations in 1920, a first in *Literae Humaniores* in 1922, and the aforementioned first in English Literature. Thus Lewis had the distinction of making a rare triple first along with the Chancellor's prize. His academic future should have been assured, but England's postwar economic disturbances extended to the ivory towers of Oxford. Academic openings were

rare. He spent 1924-1925 teaching philosophy to undergraduates at University College. That spring, Magdalen College created a Tutorship and Fellowship in English Language and Literature. Lewis, much to his relief, won the appointment.<sup>14</sup> Near the end of his first year at Magdalen he met J.R.R. Tolkien who was Rawlinson and Bosworth Professor of Anglo-Saxon at Oxford. Within a few months, Lewis was attending Tolkien's Kolbitar, a loosely formed club for professors who enjoyed reading Icelandic sagas in their original languages. The friendship thus formed would deeply influence and reward both men, not to mention millions of English reading men, women, and children.

At least as early as the autumn of 1920, Lewis mused "I have had to postulate some sort of God as the least objectionable theory: but of course we *know* [italics mine] nothing."<sup>15</sup> But the citadel of Lewis's mind did not fall easily to the entreaties of an absolute being. The "least objectionable theory" was not faith. It took years for God's pursuit of C.S. Lewis to bear fruit. Indeed, Lewis insists he did not seek God, but found that he could not avoid Him.<sup>16</sup>

Given Lewis's deeply rational mode of thought, it is reasonable to search for an equation that led him to faith in God. One will search in vain. It is not one or two proofs leading to God, but rather the weight of all of his meditations on philosophy, history, and even philology that inexorably cost him his atheism, or, as he put it, his realistic world view.<sup>17</sup> In *Surprised by Joy* he explained his change of mind as losing a chess match with the absolute (God). In retrospect he mused, "... a young atheist cannot guard his faith to carefully."<sup>18</sup> Lewis summarized his final defeat as having taken but four masterful moves on the chessboard of his mind, but of course those four moves had been in process most of his life.

Most compelling of the thoughts that presaged his final defeat, was his realization that the writers he admired most were either Christian or professed a sincere faith in an absolute God. Among the ancients these writers included Plato and Virgil, and in the early modern period John Milton and John Donne, more recently, and perhaps most importantly, George MacDonald along with G.K. Chesterton and Herbert Brown. Then too Neville Coghill, a fellow student, added to this chorus as did his colleague J.R.R. Tolkien. Of the influence of these men and other writers Lewis wrote, "The most religious were clearly those on whom I could really feed. On the other hand, those writers who did not suffer from religion and with whom in theory my sympathy ought to have been complete – Shaw, Wells, and Mill and Gibbon and Voltaire – all seemed a little thin."<sup>19</sup>

Lewis, now balancing precariously on the threshold of faith, was open to something that would restore his equilibrium at any cost. God's first of the final four moves was to rekindle Lewis's sense of longing, the anticipation of joy, through reading Euripides' *Hippolytus*. This deep desire could not be explained in any rationalist philosophy; Lewis wrote, "...the long inhibition was over, the dry desert lay behind, I was off once more into the land of longing, my heart at once broken and exalted as it had never been since the old days at Bookham."<sup>20</sup>

The second move was learning to differentiate between the emotion of joy and the object of one's joy. He wrote the "one essential property" of an emotion was attention to the object of that emotion such as a landscape, a woman, or a cathedral. But when one thinks about the joy one is experiencing, one ceases to attend to the object of that joy. Lewis, wrote, "In other words the enjoyment and the contemplation of our inner activities

(thoughts) are incompatible. You cannot hope and think about hoping at the same moment.” He continues, “The surest way of spoiling a pleasure was to start examining your satisfaction.”<sup>21</sup> So Lewis eventually realized that the essential aspect of joy was not an event of his own thoughts to be contemplated, but the object to which those thoughts were directed. Now he asked himself what is desired?<sup>22</sup>

So, in summary to this point, realism could not explain the existence of the emotion of joy, and the consideration of joy ended joy. Therefore, joy was an object outside himself. But what was it and whence did it come? Sadly, most people fail to differentiate between the emotion of joy and the object of that emotion. Fewer still find the source of perfect joy.

The third move, seemingly innocent at the time, was to link the first two moves: his new understanding of the proper object of joy – God, now coupled with his “idealistic” philosophy that allows for an unseen god. As Lewis said, “I saw that Joy would fit in.”<sup>23</sup> Lewis observed that all human beings have their root “in the absolute (god).” And god, of course, is the “utter reality. And that is why we experience joy: we yearn for that unity [with god] which we can never reach except by ceasing to be the separate phenomenal beings called we. Joy was not a deception. Its visitations were the moments of clearest consciousness [of god] we had.”<sup>24</sup> This combining of his “desire-life” with his god-based philosophy would inexorably lead him to checkmate. More than any other single element of thought was his inability to account for the emotion of joy without reference to god.

So finally his mental citadel gave way and he accepted, and then asserted, the position that there must be an omniscient and omnipotent god. Later in life Lewis saw that in moving away from atheism, he had accepted what he thought a very erudite and rational view of god and our earthly existence: there was a god behind a timeless and therefore deathless life; for lesser minds it was fine to believe in a literal life after death as it was closer to the truth than atheists ever moved. But the implications of this view did not rest easily with his high view of so many writers who had gone before. He eventually asked himself could it really be that a philosophy that “I and most other undergraduates could master without extraordinary pains would have been too hard for Plato, Dante, Hooker, and Pascal?”<sup>25</sup> The edifice of his chronological snobbery was crumbling.

There was one move left. But before understanding that step, Lewis came to believe that he must act on the knowledge of god, or spirit, as he called his absolute being. He decided that an effort at living a virtuous life must be made. A lesser mind may have succeeded at deceiving himself that living a self-defined “virtuous life” with a vague notion of god would suffice. But that would merely mean following in the footsteps those the Apostle Paul so devastatingly chastised in Romans I: 21-24 Lewis, with superb powers of introspection, was not so deceived. He wrote,

For the first time I examined myself with a seriously practical purpose. And there I found what appalled me; a zoo of lusts, a bedlam of ambitions, a nursery of fears, a harem of fondled hatreds. My name was legion. Of course I could do nothing [to overcome these faults] – I could not last one hour without recourse to what I called Spirit. But the fine philosophical distinction between this and what ordinary people call “prayer to God” breaks down as soon as you start doing it in earnest. It became patently absurd to go on thinking of “Spirit” as either ignorant

of, or passive to, my approaches. Even if my own philosophy were true, how could the initiative lie on my side?<sup>26</sup>

In other words, how could a mortal being approach, of his own volition, the absolute god without that God's knowing? And that God, being omniscient, of course knew of the lowly creature's desire. And could that omnipotent God not hide himself from his creation? Of course he could, but clearly chose not to do so. Wherein then, Lewis asked, lay the initiative for a relationship? Clearly not with the creature, but with the absolute god came the inescapable answer. This is why Lewis wrote, "You must picture me alone in that room at Magdalen, night after night, feeling the steady unrelenting approach of Him whom I so earnestly desired not to meet. That which I greatly feared had at last come upon me. I gave in and admitted that [the Judeo-Christian] God was God, and knelt and prayed: perhaps, that night, the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England."<sup>27</sup> Checkmate. Later, Lewis saw and appreciated the Divine love, even Divine humility, that received a prodigal son "even on such terms."<sup>28</sup>

In the 1930s, new Christian C.S. Lewis developed a deep understanding of the Christian faith and pursued recognition in his academic field of English literature. In both endeavors he met with significant success. *His Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition* (1936) garnered him critical acclaim, and placed him in the front rank of such scholars. Lewis also wrote on Christian themes. In 1933 he published *The Pilgrim's Regress*, an allegory (a work in which the characters and events are symbols of some other aspect of life such as politics or religion) of Lewis' own journey from atheist to Christian in which he explores all of the thoughts and beliefs of his conversion described above. Lewis described his work as a sort of updating of John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. He also produced *The Problem of Pain* in 1940, an attempt to explain from the Christian perspective why pain exists. Meanwhile he helped inspire his friend J.R.R. Tolkien<sup>1</sup> to complete *The Hobbit* (1937).

And so it was in the late summer of 1941, as Britain stood alone on its tiny island and in the Middle East against Hitler's hordes and Mussolini's minions, the BBC, in an effort to bring spiritual solace and hope to the English people, asked the relatively unknown Oxford don C.S. Lewis to give it a go. The book that came from those short radio talks is a wide-ranging look at the reasons for Christian faith, and a description of what faith is – and is not. After the war, Lewis wrote many other books on Christianity. Some of the most important were *The Screwtape Letters*, *Surprised by Joy*, and *A Grief Observed*. Not least of course was his children's fantasy *The Chronicles of Narnia*.

C.S. Lewis along with American evangelist Billy Graham, are probably the two most important Twentieth century Christians in the ecumenical (unifying of the people of Christ) movement. Both men advocated a Christian theology that was based on the Bible, crossed sectarian lines, and brought Christians together on the basis of common beliefs, rather than dividing them over minutiae. C.S. Lewis came reluctantly to Christian faith, but not to his Christian work. He was incredibly productive for the Kingdom of Christ up until his health failed him. He died on November 22, 1963, the same day American president John F. Kennedy was assassinated.

Dr. Kerry E. Irish

---



Professor of American History  
George Fox University  
Newberg, Oregon

### Other Writings by Kerry Irish

Study Guide for Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Life Together*.

{Search: Kerry Irish, study guide, Life Together}

[https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/hist\\_fac/74/](https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/hist_fac/74/)

The Lord's Prayer: A Study in Christian Theology.

{Search: Kerry Irish, The Lord's Prayer}

[https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/hist\\_fac/91/](https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/hist_fac/91/)

The Second Great Awakening and the Making of Modern America.

{Search: Kerry Irish, The Second Great Awakening}

[https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/hist\\_fac/78/](https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/hist_fac/78/)

The Apostle's Creed. [An analysis of the meaning of the Apostle's Creed.]

{Search: Kerry Irish, The Apostle's Creed}

[https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/hist\\_fac/86/](https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/hist_fac/86/)

Study Guide for David Skeel's *True Paradox: How Christianity makes Sense of Our Complex World*.

(Search: Kerry Irish, study guide, True Paradox)

[https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/hist\\_fac/75/](https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/hist_fac/75/)

Thoughts on the Importance of Attending Church.

{Search: Kerry Irish, Attending Church}

[https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/hist\\_fac/72/](https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/hist_fac/72/)

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, His Life in Brief. [This short introduction to Bonhoeffer is included in the study guide for Life Together.]

{Search: Kerry Irish: Dietrich Bonhoeffer}

[https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/hist\\_fac/14/](https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/hist_fac/14/)

C.S. Lewis: Reluctant Convert. [This short introduction to Lewis is included in the study guide for Mere Christianity.]

{Search: Kerry Irish, C.S. Lewis}

[https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/hist\\_fac/71/](https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/hist_fac/71/)

---

<sup>1</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Surprised By Joy* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich), 21.

<sup>2</sup> Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 63.

<sup>3</sup> Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 181.

- 
- <sup>4</sup> Alister McGrath, *C.S. Lewis: A Life* (Carol Stream, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2013), 47, 53.
- <sup>5</sup> C. S. Lewis to Albert Lewis, 17 November, 1918, *The Collected letters of C.S. Lewis, Vol. 1, Family Letters, 1905 -1931*, ed. Walter Hooper (San Francisco: HaperSanFrancisco, 2004), 416, 417.
- <sup>6</sup> McGrath, *C. S. Lewis*, 74, 75.
- <sup>7</sup> McGrath, *C. S. Lewis*, 80.
- <sup>8</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Spirits in Bondage: A Cycle of Lyrics* (New York: Harcourt, Brace Jovanovich Publishers, 1984), 57 (from his poem "Oxford").
- <sup>9</sup> McGrath, *C. S. Lewis*, 81, 82.
- <sup>10</sup> McGrath, *C. S. Lewis*, 95.
- <sup>11</sup> McGrath, *C. S. Lewis*, 100, 101.
- <sup>12</sup> Lewis, *Surprised By Joy*, 212-216.
- <sup>13</sup> Roger L. Green and Walter Hooper, *C.S. Lewis: The Authorized and Revised Biography* (Harper Collins Publishers, 2003), 85, 86. McGrath, *C. S. Lewis*, 131.
- <sup>14</sup> Green and Hooper, *C.S. Lewis*, 76.
- <sup>15</sup> C. S. Lewis to Leo Baker, 25 September 1920, *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis*, vol. 1, 509
- <sup>16</sup> Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 213, 216.
- <sup>17</sup> McGrath, *C. S. Lewis*, 136.
- <sup>18</sup> Lewis, *Surprised By Joy*, 226.
- <sup>19</sup> Lewis, *Surprised By Joy*, 213, 214.
- <sup>20</sup> Lewis, *Surprised By Joy*, 217.
- <sup>21</sup> Lewis, *Surprised By Joy*, 218.
- <sup>22</sup> Lewis, *Surprised By Joy*, 221.
- <sup>23</sup> Lewis, *Surprised By Joy*, 221.
- <sup>24</sup> Lewis, *Surprised By Joy*, 221, 222.
- <sup>25</sup> Lewis, *Surprised By Joy*, 215.
- <sup>26</sup> Lewis, *Surprised By Joy*, 126, 127.
- <sup>27</sup> Lewis, *Surprised By Joy*, 228, 229.
- <sup>28</sup> Lewis, *Surprised By Joy*, 229.

I have divided Mere Christianity into six discussions. Each of the discussions is labeled according to the Book and Chapters it includes. I did not use page numbers as there are many editions of Mere Christianity each with its own pagination system. However, they all retain the four books and chapter titles that Lewis used. The chapters are all about four to six pages long so finding the answers to the study questions should not be too hard.

May the Lord who pursued C.S. Lewis bless your study.

**C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity**  
**Discussion One, Book One: Right and Wrong as a Clue to the Meaning of the Universe.**

**The Law of Human Nature:**

1. What is the “Law of Human Nature?”
2. How does Lewis respond to the objection that the Law of Human Nature is not a real law as it is not observed in all human societies or cultures?
3. What is the essential problem human beings face in regard to the law of human nature?

**Some Objections:**

4. What are some of the objections people raised against Lewis’s argument concerning the Law of Human Nature?

**The Reality of the Law:**

5. Why does something being imperfect, of its not being what it ought to be, have certain consequences?
6. What are some of the objections to Lewis’s argument?

### **What Lies Behind the Law:**

7. According to Lewis, what is the materialist view of the creation of the universe?
8. And what is the opposing view?
9. And from this analysis, what lies behind the law for Lewis?
10. And if there is something “behind the law,” that has created this universe, and therefore must be outside and other than the universe, what is the essential problem?
11. What is the one thing in the whole universe that we know more about than mere external observation could tell us?
12. And what does our intimate knowledge of this thing tell us?
13. Has Lewis proved the God of Christian theology exists?

### **We Have Cause to Be Uneasy:**

14. In “We Have Cause to Be Uneasy,” Lewis addresses three objections to those who think Christianity is obsolete, and that he misled them as to his purpose. What are they?
15. What are the terrifying facts, or what is the “Cause to Be Uneasy?”

## **C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity, Discussion Two, Book Two: What Christians Believe.**

### **The Rival Conceptions of God**

1. What must atheists believe about all religions, and how does that compare to Christianity?
2. Amongst those who believe in God, what are the two main divisions?
3. What was Lewis's biggest problem with the idea of a moral god, and how did he eventually respond?

### **The Invasion:**

4. So Lewis insists that atheism is too simple, but what other point of view is too simple?
5. What is the nature of life, of reality, and what does this tell us about the nature of God?
6. So left with this mystery as to why the universe is so cruel, and yet we rationally cannot abandon the measurement by which we understand cruelty and thus say it does not matter because there is no good and evil, what two choices are left us?
7. Where do Christians live, and what is their business on the earth. Here Lewis may be said to be using allegory.

### **The Shocking Alternative:**

8. How can it be that that evil in the world is in accordance with “God’s will?”
9. What is human history, the story of mankind, made of?
10. What is the “shocking alternative” to realism, atheism or pantheism, to repeating the sad history of human beings without God?

### **The Perfect Penitent:**

11. What was the purpose of it all (Jesus’ life and death)?
12. What is repentance and do we need God’s help in doing it?

### **The Practical Conclusion (How does one appropriate the life Christ offers?):**

13. What is Lewis’s practical conclusion?
14. What is the penultimate, and very common, objection to believing the Christian gospel?
15. Why does God not just invade Earth in force instead of waging this guerilla war, and get the great conflict over with?

## **Mere Christianity, Discussion Three, Book Three, Christian Behavior, Part One (first 6 chapters)**

### **The Three Parts of Morality:**

1. What are the three parts of morality?

### **The Cardinal Virtues:**

2. What are the “Cardinal Virtues” and why are they important?
3. What is the “further point about the virtues that ought to be noticed?”

### **Social Morality:**

4. What is the “first thing” to get clear about social morality?
5. What is the second point Lewis makes about social morality?

6. What comes first, a Christian society or a Christian people?

### **Morality and Psychoanalysis:**

7. What is “the only thing” that morality is concerned with?
8. In his “second point,” Lewis describes his unique way of considering Christian morality. What is it?

### **Sexual Morality:**

9. What is the “old Christian rule” regarding chastity, and what troubling question does this raise?

### **Christian Marriage:**

10. Christian Marriage: what does love have to do with it?



## **Mere Christianity, Discussion Four, Book Three, Christian Behavior, Part Two (last six chapters)**

### **Forgiveness:**

1. On what condition are human beings granted forgiveness?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What does it mean to love your neighbor as yourself?

### **The Great Sin:**

3. What is the sin at the center of Christian morality, and what is its opposite virtue?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. Who is the author of pride, and why is it such a terrible sin?

### **Charity:**

5. What is the full meaning of the word “charity?”

**Hope:**

6. What is the Christian concept of hope, and how does Christian hope impact our life in this earthly realm?
7. What does Lewis make of the seemingly impossibility of fulfilling hopes and dreams in this life.

**Faith, Chapter One:**

8. What is the great challenge to faith once one's reason has been persuaded of the truthfulness of Christianity?
9. What must one do to create a more reliable defense against the emotional attacks on faith that will surely come?

**Faith, Chapter Two:**

10. What two kinds of "nonsense" does one find when the subject of faith and works comes up?
11. What is really going on in the faithful in regard to faith and work?

**C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity, Discussion Five, Book Four, Part One,  
Beyond Personality: Or First Steps in the Doctrine of the Trinity (first  
six chapters)**

**Making and Begetting**

1. What did Lewis decide to do that “everyone” told him not to do, and why did he ignore their advice and go his own way?
2. To what does Lewis compare theology and why?
3. What is the point in Christianity that “gives us the greatest shock?”

**The Three-Personal God**

4. What line of thought (yes, it is a pun) does Lewis use to describe a way of beginning to grasp the Three-Personal God?
5. In what circumstance does God show himself most clearly, most effectively, and why is this so?

### **Time and Beyond Time**

6. How did Lewis explain the so-called problem of God attending to so many prayers, all while running the universe, at the same time? Was he “swamped” like Prince Humperdinck (see *The Princess Bride*)?

### **Good Infection**

7. How does Lewis describe the Trinity?
8. What is the “whole purpose of becoming a Christian?”

### **The Obstinate Toy Soldiers**

9. What does the metaphor of the “Obstinate Toy Soldier” help us understand?
10. What, then, is the difference that Jesus Christ has made to the whole human mass?

### **Two Notes**

11. What are the “Two Notes?”

## **Mere Christianity, Discussion Six, Book Four, Beyond Personality: or First Steps in the Doctrine of the Trinity (last five chapters)**

### **Let's Pretend:**

1. Let's Pretend what?
2. Why should we pretend to be something we are not?
3. What do we find if we make this effort to pretend to be like Christ?

### **Is Christianity Hard or Easy?**

4. What is the "whole of Christianity," and does that make Christianity hard or easy?

### **Counting the Cost**

5. Why is the Lord Jesus Christ like a dentist?

6. What is “the fatal mistake”?

### **Nice People or New Men**

7. Lewis says that nonbelievers often ask the question: if Christianity is true why are not all Christians obviously nicer than all other non-Christians? He then asserts it is a very reasonable question if what?
8. Lewis asserts that those who ask that question (if Christianity is true why are not all Christians obviously nicer than all other non-Christians?) usually make illogical assumptions about those claiming to be Christians. What are those assumptions?
9. If the world had been populated by generally nice people, would the Lord’s work in conversion have been easier?

### **The New Men**

10. To what end does Lewis use the concept of evolution in “The New Men”?

C. S. Lewis's *Mere Christianity* is one of the most influential Christian books of the Twentieth century. In his short but powerful work, Lewis provided profound reasons for the Christian faith inspiring many Christians to a more sure faith in Christ. Moreover, the book has helped many non-Christians come to that saving faith in the Son of God. Lewis also had a tremendous impact, perhaps immeasurable, on the ecumenical (unifying) movement of the last half of the Twentieth century. As we have seen, *Mere Christianity* means the essence of Christianity, a Christian faith shorn of its non-essential doctrines. Christians today are more likely to see someone who worships in a church other than one's own as a brother or sister in Christ than our ancestors in the faith often did. And While Lewis wrote carefully and passionately about the necessity of faith in Christ, he also wrote powerfully about "the whole purpose of Christianity." Modern Christians usually think that Christianity is the pathway to heaven. But for Lewis, this view puts the cart before the horse. Christianity for C.S. Lewis was a life-changing faith. As he put it, when one is born again, one puts off the "bios" or earthly life, and becomes a new creature with an eternal spiritual life or "zoe." In this zoe life the new creature is human in the way God originally intended as he or she has the presence of the Holy Spirit. This new zoe creature could thus not possibly die as it is part of the eternal God. So this is *Mere Christianity*: reasons for faith, the unifying essence of the Christian faith explained, and the meaning of the Christian life emphasized. May God Bless you all as you contemplate Lewis's little book.

Kerry E. Irish  
Professor of American History  
George Fox University