

Fr. Tom's Celestial Musings

The Screwtape Letters- by C.S. Lewis

Part 4: What's Real¹

We live in a world of illusion generated by special effects, assumptions, misunderstandings, sins, and personal hurts. We think we know what is real, but our definition of reality is frequently based on our emotional wounds and Hollywood's extraordinary plots. We have become so accustomed to this form of "reality" that we rarely question it anymore. We often just go through life trying to make it from day to day, not scrutinizing what is authentically real.

The very first letter from Screwtape to his nephew, Wormwood, covers the topic of what is real. Screwtape, a seasoned demon and tempter, cautions his nephew to never do anything that will make humans logically question their reality. Most people believe that what is "real" is what they can perceive with their five senses, completely ignoring the spiritual reality that surpasses the physical world. Humans also call those things "real" that are emotional and subjective. He cautions his nephew, writing, "Jargon, not argument, is your best ally in keeping him from the Church. Teach him to call it 'real life' and don't let him ask what he means by 'real.'"² He furthers his point, writing, "[humans] find it all but impossible to believe in the unfamiliar while the familiar is before their eyes. Keep pressing home on [them] the *ordinariness* of things."³

Most of us find ourselves living a *routine*. That routine includes our emotional wounds, attachments, and our sinful inclinations. We become so familiar with these things that they become "normal" and "real" for us, when, ironically, they are the furthest thing from the reality God desires for us. Lewis recognized that there are only two things that can shake us from our routine and give us an opportunity to see God's reality—pain and authentic pleasure. Screwtape explains this, writing, "The characteristic of Pains and Pleasures is that they are unmistakably real."⁴

A brief example might better explain the point Lewis is making in his book. A young man finds himself at odds with everyone at work. No one seems to like him. Every day, he makes great efforts to be kind and loving to those with whom he works, but he keeps getting rejected by them. In order to avoid the deep emotional pain of their rejection, he becomes angry and judgmental. If the young man never goes any deeper into reality than his anger, then he will miss the true pain of the situation. In reality, the man has always felt rejected by others, going all the way back to his childhood when he was abandoned by his family. This is the *real* hurt, the *real* pain. The awareness of that pain can be a wonderful catalyst for healing and wholeness. The man will find his heart changing. All of sudden, he will see that the co-workers whom he thought rejected him are reaching out to him in love and acceptance. Defining his reality based on his emotional wounds led to isolation and rejection, whereas, recognizing his *real* pain led him to spiritual and emotional healing.

Satan wants us to remain in the "normality" of our dysfunctions and emotional hurts. He does not want us to question those perceived realities. God, on the other hand, desires for us to perceive things as He perceives them. He desires for us to be intimately in touch with authentic spiritual pains and pleasures that will awaken us to who we are and Who He is.

¹ This article is part four of a twelve part series that I am writing on C.S. Lewis' [The Screwtape Letters](#).

² Ibid., pg. 1-2.

³ Ibid., pg. 4.

⁴ Ibid., pg. 64.