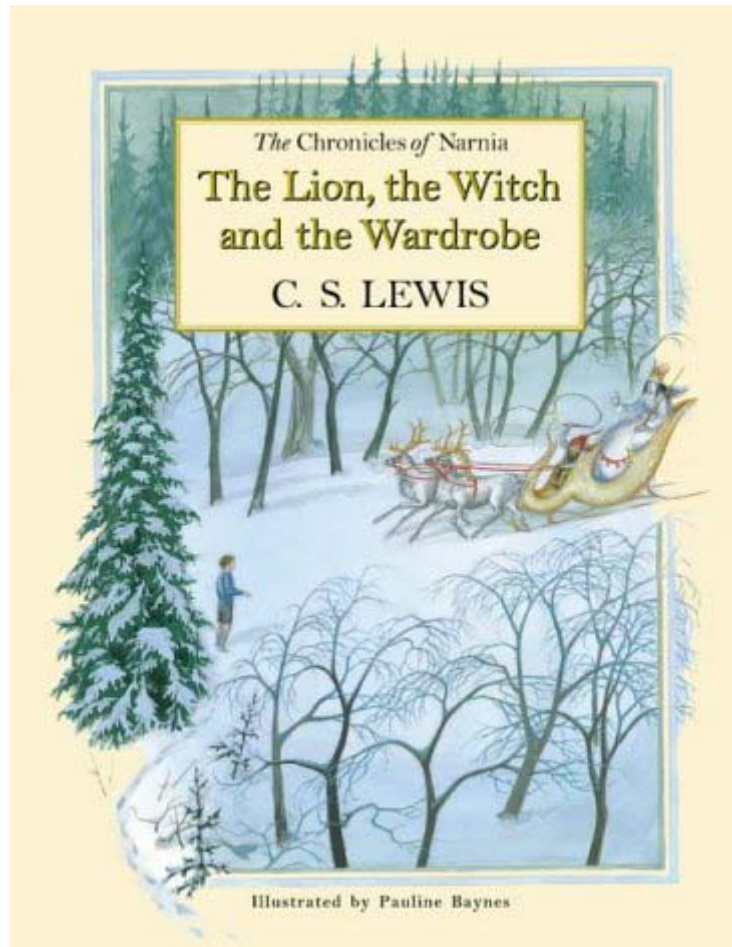


**Study Guide for C. S. Lewis'**  
***The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe***



## Background to the series

*The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* is the first of the seven Chronicles of Narnia, which were published between 1950 and 1956. C. S. Lewis had already published a science fiction trilogy and was already known for his books explaining Christianity when he turned to writing children's fiction.

Although the books are written for children, Lewis expected adults to enjoy them as well, at least adults who shared his taste in books. He argued:

It is usual to speak in a playfully apologetic tone about one's adult enjoyment of what are called 'children's books'. I think the convention a silly one. No book is really worth reading at the age of ten which is not equally (and often far more) worth reading at the age of fifty – except, of course, books of information. The only imaginative works we ought to grow out of are those which it would have been better not to have read at all. A mature palate will probably not much care for *crème de menthe*: but it ought still to enjoy bread and butter and honey.<sup>1</sup>

Elsewhere he said, “When I was ten, I read fairy tales in secret and would have been ashamed if I had been found doing so. Now that I am fifty I read them openly. When I became a man I put away childish things, including the fear of childishness and the desire to be very grown up.”<sup>2</sup>

Some people think that the reason he turned to writing for children was that his attempts to argue for Christian faith rationally weren't working as well as he'd hoped, and so he decided he needed a different approach, an approach that would touch people's hearts more than their heads. Even if he was not in fact discouraged about his apologetic writing, Lewis certainly saw potential in this new genre.

I thought I saw how stories of this kind could steal past a certain inhibition which had paralysed much of my own religion in childhood. Why did one find it so hard to feel as one was told one ought to feel about God or about the sufferings of Christ? I thought the chief reason was that one was told one ought to. An obligation to feel can freeze feelings. And reverence itself did harm. The whole subject was associated with lowered voices; almost as if it were something medical. But supposing that by casting all these things into an imaginary world, stripping them of their stained-glass and Sunday school associations, one could make them for the first time appear in their real potency? Could one not thus steal past those watchful dragons? I thought one could.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “On Stories,” in *On Stories and Other Essays on Literature*, ed. Walter Hooper (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982), p. 14. 0-15-668788-7

<sup>2</sup> “On Three Ways of Writing for Children,” in *On Stories and Other Essays on Literature*, p. 34.

<sup>3</sup> “Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What's to Be Said,” in *On Stories and Other Essays on Literature*, ed. Walter Hooper (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982), p. 47. 0-15-668788-7

But he only started to think about this possibility consciously after the stories were well begun. He started writing by describing pictures that he had in his head, with no plan about how the story would turn out.

While Lewis was writing *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, he was also working on turning his war-time radio talks into a book, which was eventually issued as *Mere Christianity*. Since he was working on the two projects at the same time, it's not surprising that many of the themes from *Mere Christianity* find their way in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. In the "Going Deeper" section of each lesson, we'll look especially at themes from *Mere Christianity*, as well as at some of Lewis's other writings.



## Chapter 1: Lucy Looks into a Wardrobe

### Background Information:

During World War II, when the Germans were bombing London, children were often evacuated to safer houses out in the country. In 1939, Lewis took in several evacuated children to his home in Oxford, and he wrote to his brother that these children were easily bored and always needed suggestions about what to do.<sup>4</sup>

This story is set in 1940. It is dedicated to the daughter of Lewis' good friend Owen Barfield, a little girl named Lucy. Look to see if the letter that he wrote to Lucy is reprinted on the dedication page in your edition of the book.

We know from the other books in the Narnia series that the children's last name is Pevensie, but that name isn't used in this story.

### Questions for Discussion:

1. Lucy and Edmund have very different reactions to the Professor. Lucy is a little afraid, and Edmund wants to laugh. What do these reactions tell us about Lucy and Edmund? Which reaction is wiser?
2. By the end of this chapter, what do you know about the personalities of the four children? Which of the four do you like the most so far? Which of the four is most like you?
3. Lots of fairytales include some sort of a door from this world into another world. Can you think of any other stories like this? Have you ever imagined being able to step out of this world into another one?
4. Why might there be a lamp-post in the middle of a wood? Can you imagine a story that might explain this? You'll need to read another of the Narnia chronicles – *The Magician's Nephew* – if you want to find out.

### Going Deeper:

Once the Chronicles of Narnia became popular, lots of people began to speculate about what Lewis was thinking about when he wrote them and what his writing process had been. Lewis was always impatient with that sort of analysis since he said it was almost always wrong. He says:

Some people seem to think that I began by asking myself how I could say something about Christianity to children; then fixed on the fairy tale as an

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<sup>4</sup> *Letters of C. S. Lewis*, ed. Walter Hooper, Rev. Ed. (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1993), p. 326. Letter from September 18, 1939.

instrument; then collected information about child-psychology and decided what age-group I'd write for; then drew up a list of basic Christian truths and hammered out 'allegories' to embody them. This is all pure moonshine. I couldn't write that way at all. Everything began with images. ...<sup>5</sup>

In Lewis' imagination, stories always start with a picture.

I have never exactly 'made' a story. With me the process is much more like bird-watching than like either talking or building. I see pictures. Some of these pictures have a common flavour, almost a common smell, which groups them together. Keep quiet and watch and they will begin joining themselves up. If you were very lucky (I have never been as lucky as all that) a whole set might join themselves so consistently that there you had a complete story; without doing anything yourself. But more often (in my experience always) there are gaps. Then at last you have to do some deliberate inventing, have to contrive reasons why these characters should be in these various places doing these various things. I have no idea whether that is the usual way of writing stories, still less whether it is the best. It is the only one I know: images always come first.<sup>6</sup>

In the case of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, we know exactly what picture he started with because he's told us.

The *Lion* all began with a picture of a Faun carrying an umbrella and parcels in a snowy wood. This picture had been in my mind since I was about sixteen. Then one day, when I was about forty, I said to myself: 'Let's try to make a story about it.'

So the picture at the very end of the first chapter is what Lewis had in his mind when he started writing.

(BTW: Lewis worked very closely with Pauline Baynes on her illustrations for the Narnia books, so if you have an edition with her illustrations pay close attention. He was very pleased with how well she had captured the pictures in his head. The small paperback editions sometimes have rather smudged versions of these illustrations that don't do her work justice, but there are some "deluxe" editions in which they've been carefully reproduced. Many are also reproduced in Brian Sibley's book *The Land of Narnia*.)

Not everyone's imagination works like this, and not everyone begins with pictures when starting to write a story. As you read this book, look for signs of Lewis' visual way of processing the story. He is not as concerned with creating exciting events as he is with describing what he is seeing, and this affects the story. I suspect that this is also one reason why the Narnia stories stand up well to repeated re-readings. The power of the story is not found in your uncertainty about what is going to happen next. Lewis thought that any book

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<sup>5</sup> "Sometimes Fairy Stories..." p. 46.

<sup>6</sup> "On Three Ways of Writing for Children," p.41.

worth reading was worth re-reading and believed that he didn't get the full effect of a book until at least his second time through it.

We do not enjoy a story fully at the first reading. Not till the curiosity ... has been given its sop and laid asleep, are we at leisure to savour the real beauties. ... The children understand this well when they ask for the same story over and over again, and in the same words. They want to have again the 'surprise' of discovering that what seemed Little Red Riding Hood's grandmother is really the wolf. It is better when you know it is coming: free from the shock of actual surprise you can attend better to the intrinsic surprisingness of the *peripeteia*.<sup>7</sup>

He uses the analogy of the sort of "surprise" that is often built into a formal garden, that as you come around a corner you find something that you weren't expecting. But Lewis thinks that the pleasure of such a surprise is even greater when you know it's coming, so that even as you approach the bend you can notice the unexpectedness of what is coming. I always feel this way when I am driving to Lake Michigan down a dirt road in farm country in Montague. There is nothing about the scenery that suggests the presence of the great lake at the end of the road, and my awareness of that surprise is part of my pleasure in driving down the dirt road. The first time I went, I was surprised, but I missed the anticipatory pleasure. All of which is to say, even if you've read this book before, you should be able to read it again and savor it in a new way as we go through this process together.



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<sup>7</sup> "On Stories," p.17.

## Chapter 2: What Lucy Found There

### Background Information:

Mr. Tumnus is a *faun*, a mythical creature who's half man and half goat. There should be a picture of Mr. Tumnus at the beginning of chapter 2. Many of the creatures referred to in this chapter are taken out of Greek mythology.

Mr. Tumnus invites Lucy to eat various kinds of toast, sardines, boiled eggs, and sugar-topped cake. Although that may sound like a strange meal to you, it's a typical English children's tea. Lewis once told a friend, "You can't get a cup of tea large enough or a book long enough to suit me."<sup>8</sup> As you read the book, notice how often Lewis describes food and how the description of food gives you clues about what you should be feeling and thinking.

Notice that one of the books in Mr. Tumnus' room is called *Is Man a Myth?* Lewis thought it was important for people to remember that we're not the center of the world. He also wrote science fiction with the same theme. His science fiction trilogy consists of *Out of the Silent Planet*, *Perelandra*, and *That Hideous Strength*.

If you've read the Harry Potter books (and if you haven't, you should!), think about comparing them to the Narnian Chronicles. J. K. Rowling has said that C. S. Lewis is one of her two favorite authors (the other being Jane Austen). Notice that both Rowling and Lewis have found a way to construct a world that is not industrialized, in which nature is very important, and in which the characters are held to "old-fashioned" standards of honor and chivalry. Both Rowling and Lewis draw on creatures from Greek mythology and from other folklore. But there are also some interesting differences. For instance, even though you get to the wizarding world through "portals" (such as the Leaky Cauldron or Platform 9  $\frac{3}{4}$ ), it is still part of our world, whereas Narnia is another world altogether.

### Questions for Discussion:

1. In Narnia, people from our world are referred to as "Sons of Adam and Daughters of Eve." For Lewis, this is a title of great honor, but also a title of great shame. Why would it would be both?
2. Throughout these books, we learn things about characters from the homes they live in. So what does Mr. Tumnus' home tell us about his character?
3. What is the significance that in Narnia it's "always winter and never Christmas."
4. What new things did you learn about the land of Narnia in this chapter?

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<sup>8</sup> Told by Walter Hooper in the Preface to *On Stories*, p. ix.

### Going Deeper:

While Mr. Tumnus is singing to Lucy she wants “to cry and laugh and dance and go to sleep all at the same time.” This is a simple way of describing an experience that was very important to Lewis. Sometimes he called it “longing,” sometimes “joy,” and sometimes he used a German word, *Sehnsucht*. His autobiography is called *Surprised by Joy*, and the “joy” in the title is this sort of experience. (It’s an interesting coincidence that he later married a woman named Joy!) He wrote about this experience in several of his books, claiming that at the times when we feel such longing or joy we are really wanting Heaven. Here’s his explanation from *Mere Christianity*.

Most people, if they had really learned to look into their own hearts, would know that they do want, and want acutely, something that cannot be had in this world. There are all sorts of things in this world that offer to give it to you, but they never quite keep their promise. The longings which arise in us when we first fall in love, or first think of some foreign country, or first take up some subject that excites us, are longings which no marriage, no travel, no learning, can really satisfy. I am not now speaking of what would be ordinarily called unsuccessful marriages, or holidays, or learned careers. I am speaking of the best possible ones. There was something we grasped at, in that first moment of longing, which just fades away in the reality. I think everyone knows what I mean. The wife may be a good wife, and the hotels and scenery may have been excellent, and chemistry may be a very interesting job: but something has evaded us. Now there are two wrong ways of dealing with this fact, and one right one.

(1) The Fool’s Way. – He puts blame on the things themselves. He goes on all his life thinking that if only he tried another woman, or went for a more expensive holiday, or whatever it is, then, this time, he really would catch the mysterious something we are all after. Most of the bored, discontented, rich people in the world are of this type. They spend their whole lives trotting from woman to woman (through the divorce courts), from continent to continent, from hobby to hobby, always thinking that the latest is “the Real Thing” at last, and always disappointed.

(2) The Way of the Disillusioned “Sensible Man.” – He soon decides that the whole thing was moonshine. “Of course,” he says, “one feels like that when one’s young. But by the time you get to my age you’ve given up chasing the rainbow’s end.” And so he settles down and learns not to expect too much and represses the part of himself which used, as he would say, “to cry for the moon.” This is, of course, a much better way than the first, and makes a man much happier, and less of a nuisance to society. It tends to make him a prig (he is apt to be rather superior towards what he calls “adolescents”), but, on the whole, he rubs along fairly comfortably. It would be the best line we could take if man did not live for ever. But supposing infinite happiness really is there, waiting for us? Supposing one really can reach the rainbow’s end? In that case it would be a pity to find out too late (a moment after death, that by our supposed “common sense” we had stifled in ourselves the faculty of enjoying it.)

(3) The Christian Way. – The Christian says, “Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for those desires exists. A baby feels hunger: well, there is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim: well, there is such a thing as

water. Men feel sexual desire: well, there is such a thing as sex. If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world. If none of my earthly pleasures satisfy it, that does not prove that the universe is a fraud. Probably earthly pleasures were never meant to satisfy it, but only to arouse it, to suggest the real thing. If that is so, I must take care, on the one hand, never to despise, or be unthankful for, these earthly blessings, and on the other, never to mistake them for the something else of which they are only a kind of copy, or echo, or mirage. I must keep alive in myself the desire for my true country, which I shall not find till after 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.”<sup>9</sup>

Lewis thought that this experience of longing for heaven was a sort of experiential proof for the truth of Christianity and that people who wanted to test whether Christianity was true should follow their longing (as opposed to the currently popular idea of following your “bliss”). In other words, you should cultivate this sense of restlessness rather than stifling it the way the “sensible” person does.

This idea is not new in C. S. Lewis. One of the things that makes Lewis so worth reading is that he has very few new ideas; he is usually taking very old ideas and presenting them in fresh ways. This idea of the value of longing or discontent is found already in Augustine, who says at the beginning of his *Confessions*: “You have made us for yourself, O God, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.” The theme of the restless heart runs through the entire book of the *Confessions*, which ends with a meditation on the eternal Sabbath rest that awaits us in Heaven.

Lucy’s moment of joy and longing is not the only such moment in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. The theme is even stronger in some of the other Chronicles, perhaps especially in *The Silver Chair*.



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<sup>9</sup> *Mere Christianity*, Rev. ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1956), pp. 104-106. Book III, chapter 10.

## Chapter 3: Edmund and the Wardrobe

### Background Information

Notice that in contemporary popular usage a “white witch” is a good witch, as opposed to someone who practices “black magic.” Lewis uses these images very differently. The white witch is presented as sterile, lacking life, contrasted with the radiant color of the spring. Later in the book, we’ll see the contrast between her cold white face and the golden radiance of Aslan.

When Edmund says, “Make it Pax,” he means “let’s make up.” *Pax* is Latin for peace. Almost all British children in the first part of the twentieth century studied Latin in school, so in British school stories children often use Latin words and phrases when talking to each other.

Remember that Lewis wrote this book for a little girl named Lucy. When Edmund says, “Just like a girl...” Lewis may be teasing his friend Lucy, but he’s not agreeing with Edmund.

“Sledge” is just another word for sleigh.

### Questions for Discussion

1. Why hasn’t any time passed when Lucy gets back from Narnia?
2. Do you think that Lucy’s brothers and sister should have believed her? Would you have believed a story like hers?
3. Why do you think Lucy is so upset and unhappy when she finds that people don’t believe her story?
4. Notice that Lewis makes a point of contrasting Edmund’s habit of closing the wardrobe door with Lucy’s deliberateness in not closing it. What’s the point?
5. What more have we learned about Lucy and Edmund’s characters? Which one is wiser?

### Going Deeper

What do we gain from thinking about the possibility of other worlds, worlds that aren’t accessible to us through technological means, through our own cleverness or work, but worlds that we can only reach through a gift or a call, worlds that aren’t about us, where we’re marginalized guests? Lewis believed that this sort of story – which is common in folklore and myth as well as in contemporary books and movies – is driven by a desire for something other, something fundamentally unlike ourselves, a desire that is an important part of human nature. We long for connection with something that’s not known, not human, or if it’s human it’s human in a new way.

So is that a longing that you find in yourself? One of Lewis's frustrations and surprises was discovering that not all his students shared this curiosity about that which was not like themselves. Early in his life he had assumed that this was in everyone, though in some people it still needed to be awakened, but his teaching showed him that some people altogether lack a desire to experience what is other than themselves. I believe that in these early chapters Edmund is being presented as someone who lacks this essential curiosity, or at least as someone in whom this curiosity is not yet awake. He interacts with people in terms of what they can do for him, without any desire to get to know them or expand his world by encountering new ideas.

For Lewis, it was reading that gave him the experience of encounter with otherness the most vividly throughout his life. In his book about the nature of reading, *An Experiment in Criticism*, he talks about how reading makes us bigger, because through reading we experience multiple lives. To use the language of Paul Ricoeur, in reading the small horizon of our everyday life is fused with other horizons, making our horizon bigger. This can also happen through attentive listening, through personal relationships, and through travel, but surely reading is one of the most efficient ways to experience a wide range of other experiences – and only reading allows us to enter into another time or into someone else's imagined world of fantasy. Well, not *only* reading. At its best, film can do this too. The essential ingredient isn't print on paper but a story in which you can lose yourself.

Part of what Lewis is interested in is getting to truths that are beyond the particularity of specific places and times, but he thinks that we can only get to such truths *through* the particularity of specific places and times. He says, "In life and art both, as it seems to me, we are always trying to catch in our net of successive moments something that is not successive."<sup>10</sup> I think this is one of the reasons that Lewis introduces a time difference between the land of Narnia and our world. Because time does not move at the same pace in the two worlds, it is possible for a visitor from our world to see the totality of Narnia's history in a way that we can never see the totality of our own history. But you'll only grasp this by reading all seven Chronicles!



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<sup>10</sup> "On Stories," p.19.

## Chapter 4: Turkish Delight

### Background Information

There's a long Christian tradition that says virtue isn't just loving the right things, but also loving things the right amount. One of Edmund's problems in this chapter is, not that he likes Turkish Delight (which is a good enough thing), but that he likes it way too much. We're supposed to practice *ordinate* love, i.e., loving things in the right order, giving things the amount of love that's appropriate to the thing. You have to make sure that you love everything that's good, recognizing all the goodness that God's put in the world, but also that you love the right things the most. So it's good to love both chocolate cake and your family, since these are both good things. But if you love chocolate cake *more* than you love your family, then you're dealing with *inordinate* love, a love that's out of order, out of proportion to what's being loved.

Turkish Delight is a sugary candy that I found very disappointing the first time I tried it. Why didn't he ask for chocolate?

### Questions for Discussion

1. What would you have asked for if the Queen offered you your favorite food?
2. Have you ever had something that you couldn't get enough of? No matter how much you had, you always wanted more? Was that a good experience or a bad experience?
3. Edmunds wants to be sure that his brothers and sisters will be less important than he will be once he's a prince. He wants the queen to know that "there's nothing special about *them*." Have you ever felt this way about someone else, as if you really wanted the other person to fail, to be less than you are?
4. By the end of the chapter, Lucy and Edmund seem to be on different sides of the conflict in Narnia. If Edmund had met Mr. Tumnus first and Lucy had met the Queen first, would they have been on opposite sides? Which side would you have been on?

### Going Deeper

Remember that when Lucy met Mr. Tumnus, she didn't understand the reference to being a Daughter of Eve. Now, in this chapter, Edmund doesn't understand the reference to a Son of Adam. Neither Lucy nor Edmund really know who they are. In *Mere Christianity*, Lewis points out that human beings are all inter-connected.

They look separate because you see them walking about separately. But then, we are so made that we can see only the present moment. If we could see the past, then of course it would look different. For there was a time when every man was part of his mother, and (earlier still) part of his father as well: and when they were part of his grandparents. If you could see humanity spread out in time, as God sees it, it

would not look like a lot of separate things dotted about. It would look like one single growing thing – rather like a very complicated tree. Every individual would appear connected with every other. And not only that. Individuals are not really separate from God any more than from one another.. Every man, woman, and child all over the world is feeling and breathing at this moment only because God, so to speak, is “keeping him going.”<sup>11</sup>

Edmund fails to recognize his connection with humanity throughout history and also his connection with other people who are close to him. Rather than understand himself as connected to his family, he turns his family life into a competition, being resentful of his brother Peter just because Peter is older and more accomplished than Edmund is. Peter hasn't hurt Edmund in any way, but Edmund can't feel superior around Peter, and he blames Peter for this. That sort of competitive resentment is rooted in pride, which Lewis reminds us is the deadliest of the deadly sins.

... Pride is *essentially* competitive – is competitive by its very nature – while the other vices are competitive only, so to speak, by accident. Pride gets no pleasure out of having something, only out of having more of it than the next man. ...

Other vices may sometimes bring people together: you may find good fellowship and jokes and friendliness among drunken people or unchaste people. But Pride always means enmity – it *is* enmity. And not only enmity between man and man, but enmity to God.

In God you come up against something which is in every respect immeasurably superior to yourself. Unless you know God as that – and, therefore, know yourself as nothing in comparison – you do not know God at all. As long as you are proud you cannot know God. A proud man is always looking down on things and people: and, of course, as long as you are looking down, you cannot see something that is above you.<sup>12</sup>

In Edmund, Lewis is portraying something we all recognize – the tendency (and it's in each one of us) to cultivate resentment and bitterness, to enjoy the pain of others.



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<sup>11</sup> *Mere Christianity*, pp. 140-141. Book IV, chapter 4.

<sup>12</sup> *Mere Christianity*, pp. 95-96. Book III, chapter 8.

## Chapter 5: Back on This Side of the Door

### Background Information:

Lewis (who was a professor at Oxford University) seems to have patterned the character of the Professor on himself. The Professor's name is Digory Kirke; some people think that J. K. Rowling's character Cedric Diggory is meant to be a tribute to Lewis.

Notice that Peter doesn't shut the door to the wardrobe, suggesting that he shares Lucy's prudent nature as opposed to Edmund's rashness. Lewis values common sense, the ability to see the world as it is. Lucy and Peter do this, but Edmund does not.

### Questions for Discussion:

1. Have you ever made a deliberate choice to be nasty, the way Edmund does at the beginning of this chapter?
2. Peter says that Edmund has "always liked being beastly to anyone smaller than" himself. How does that fit with his desire to have Peter and Susan (who are bigger than he is) ignored by the Queen?
3. When Peter and Susan talk to the Professor, Peter says, "if things are real, they're there all the time." Is he right? What do you think of the Professor's logic in this conversation?
4. Do you think the Professor was right not to intervene and defend Lucy?
5. Lewis gives three possible explanations of how the children end up in the wardrobe: either they "lost their heads," or "Mrs. Macready was trying to catch them," or "some magic in the house had come to life and was chasing them into Narnia." Which do you think it was?

### Going Deeper:

One writer about Lewis, Stephen Smith, calls the Narnia Chronicles "fictional pre-apologetics," because they prepare people to hear the gospel.<sup>13</sup> Smith goes on to say, "As we speak of creating a disposition to *hear* the gospel as 'pre-evangelism,' we can speak of creating a predisposition to *believe* the truth of the Christian vision and to doubt the alternatives as 'pre-apologetics.'" He argues that the best to do this is by an appeal to the imagination through stories, rather than by an appeal to the mind through reasoning. They're stories that many people have found prepare them to engage with other, more rational, apologetic works later. These stories open our hearts to the possibility of wonder, of the super-natural, of worlds beyond our everyday experience.

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<sup>13</sup> Stephen M. Smith, "Awakening from the Enchantment of Worldliness: The Chronicles of Narnia as Pre-Apologetics," in *The Pilgrim's Guide: C. S. Lewis and the Art of Witness*, ed. David Mills (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), p. 169. 0-8028-3777-8.

Smith suggests that the problem Peter and Susan have with believing Lucy's account of Narnia is exactly the same sort of the problem that many contemporary people have with believing the Christian gospel. Their assumptions make it seem impossible by definition. They start with the assumption that there can't be other worlds; therefore, it's impossible that Lucy could be speaking the truth. In the same way many contemporary people start with the assumption that there could be no such thing as a resurrection, or a miracle, or any divine intervention in human affairs. Therefore, it's impossible that Christians could be speaking the truth.

Smith says that there are two questions here. The first is about testing the evidence. Who is more believable, Lucy or Edmund? The argument is similar to Lewis' argument in *Mere Christianity* when he presses his readers to ask themselves whether Jesus is a reliable witness when he identifies himself as God. Lewis points out that it's illogical to think that Jesus is a great moral teacher if you're unwilling to believe what he says about himself as divine. You may think he's a lunatic, or a liar, or you must accept his self-assessment and believe that he's God. In the same way it's illogical to think that Lucy is honest and clear-headed, but yet refuse to consider that she may be right when she gives testimony to an experience that she's had in another world.

The second question is "how can we believe the report of an event that lies outside what we know (or think we know) to be believable or plausible."<sup>14</sup> In his book *Miracles*, Lewis addressed this question directly, pointing out that many contemporary thinkers are so committed to naturalism as a presupposition that they will accept the most bizarre and improbably naturalistic explanations rather than consider the possibility of a miracle. Lewis believed that our encounters with those unlike ourselves could help to expand our sense of what might be possible. So reading, travel, attentive conversations with those unlike ourselves all help us to become more logical, to let go of unexamined presuppositions and consider possibilities that had not occurred to us before.



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<sup>14</sup> Smith, p. 173.

## Chapter 6: Into the Forest

### Background Information

Fenris Ulf is the name of the chief of the Witch's police force; he's a wolf, as his name suggests. In British versions of the book, he is called Maugrim. Those of you who have read Harry Potter books will remember the Grim, a similar word for a similarly menacing dog/wolf of death. Lewis and Rowling are evoking the same tradition.

When Lewis was a little boy, he made up an imaginary world called Boxen, which was populated with talking animals, so his love of this sort of literature went back to the beginning of his life. When he wrote the Narnia books, he explained that he was simply writing the sorts of books he himself liked to read. So the question is: Why do so many of people all over the world like stories about talking animals? One commentator points out that characters who are talking animals can bridge the world between children and adults. They have adult independence, but they don't have all the practical worries and concerns of typical adults. Another idea comes from J. R. R. Tolkien, who suggests that maybe our love of talking animals is a sign of our desire to be more united to the natural world, to be able to communicate with the natural world. So what do you think?

### Questions for Discussion

1. As soon as the children all come into Narnia, Peter's first act is to apologize to Lucy. What do we learn about his character here?
2. Peter says, "I suppose this whole country is in the wardrobe." Do you think he's right?
3. Edmund acts as though he's the victim when the others figure out that he lied about being in Narnia before, saying to himself, "I'll pay you all out for this, you pack of stuck-up, self-satisfied prigs." Have you ever had this experience, of doing something wrong and feeling that you were being picked on?
4. When Lucy finds out that Mr. Tumnus has been arrested, she feels responsible. What does this tell us about Lucy?

### Going Deeper

At the end of the chapter, Edmund sounds very reasonable when he points out to Peter that they can't really know which side is the right side here. But Lewis doesn't want us to be fooled by Edmund. Lewis was always very concerned with a sort of Dualist understanding of reality that suggested there are two forces at war with each other in our world, that we're caught between those two forces, and that it's somewhat arbitrary which side you choose to be on. As if Good and Evil were two equally valid political parties. Or as if God could have declared a whole different set of principles to be Good, so that what's Good is all arbitrary. That's precisely the tone that Edmund is taking here at the end of the chapter.

In contrast, Lewis pointed out that even though Christians *do* see the world as torn between two forces, those are not two equal forces. God is the Creator of the world, the source of the Natural Law that we all know in our hearts even though none of us lives up to it, a Natural Law to which we appeal whenever things aren't fair or good. This is also what Paul says in the letter to the Romans when he warns that we are all "without excuse" before God, because God's law is written on our hearts. Even though we've never experienced real fairness and goodness, since we live in a messed up world, we still have an idea of some sort of standard of fairness and goodness, and we all know that we're not living up to that standard.

God is the source of everything that's worth having in the world, and the other force is a rebel force, not equal to God at all but a parasite on God's creative work. Lewis argued that clear-sighted people should be able to see which is the right side without any ambiguity, in part because the bad side is never able to create anything new. There's nothing creative about evil; evil is always a parasite on goodness, taking what goodness makes and giving it a twist. Without goodness, evil couldn't exist, but without evil goodness would be just fine. The Queen has been a parasite in Narnia. She's taken the good cycle of the seasons and broken it, so that it's always winter. She hasn't invented some new season. She hasn't created a new world. She's using the good world in a bad way.

Lewis explains this idea with particular clarity in his book *The Great Divorce*, which is an imaginative look at the nature of Heaven. Lewis imagines that the more people become what God wants them to be, the more solid and real and substantial they become. So when people from Hell visit Heaven, they find that they are wispy and insubstantial, that they have so little weight they can't even make the grass bend as they walk across it. They cannot influence the goodness of Heaven at all because they have such a little bit of reality left; almost everything they are is a lie and an illusion. That's what evil is – it's a power of lies and illusions that twists and obscures the good, but ultimately cannot conquer it.



## Chapter 7: A Day with the Beavers

### Background Information

Remember that Lewis loves to describe food. This meal at the Beavers' is meant to be a very wholesome dinner, including all of Lewis' favorites. He gives his own taste to Mr. Beaver who drinks beer and tea and smokes a pipe after dinner. Edmund's inability to love this food and eat heartily is a sign of his spiritual sickness.

The name "Aslan" is based on the Turkish word for lion.

### Questions for Discussion

1. Look again at Lewis' description of how the four children felt when they first heard the name "Aslan." Why are there such differences between them? What does this tell us about the children? What do we learn from this about Aslan?
2. Have you ever seen the "sort of modest expression" on someone's face that the children saw on Mr. Beaver's face when they first saw his dam?
3. When Edmund thinks about becoming king, why is his pleasure greater because Peter won't be king?
4. What do we know about the Beavers from their house? How is it different from Mr. Tumnus' house?
5. Compare the three "meals" we've read about so far: tea with Mr. Tumnus, Turkish Delight with the Queen, and dinner with the Beavers.

### Going Deeper

Edmund's experience of hearing the name "Aslan" is different from Peter's, Susan's, and Lucy's because he has been making different sorts of choices in his life. Taken by themselves, the nasty things he's done thus far in this book may not seem all that important. It may seem as though Lewis is exaggerating the effect that being mean to your kid sister or having an inordinate love of candy can have on a person. Lewis says that before his conversion he was puzzled by how Christians seemed "to be so very strict at one moment and so very free and easy at another. They talk about mere sins of thought as if they were immensely important: and then they talk about the most frightful murders and treacheries as if you had only got to repent and all would be forgiven."<sup>15</sup> Once he became a Christian, however, he came to understand that the key thing is what's happening *inside* of you, whether you are growing toward God or away from God. If you're like most people – a fairly small, unimportant person without much power – your sinful inner self may not hurt many people in any obvious way, but that doesn't mean that you're necessarily more

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<sup>15</sup> *Mere Christianity*, p. 72.

virtuous than someone who does hurt a lot of people. The difference between an Edmund and a Hitler may be largely one of power and opportunity.

Decisions to turn away from God leave a permanent “mark” on our inner selves, permanent in the sense that they have eternal consequences. This is true no matter what external, temporal consequences those decisions may have.

One man may be so placed that his anger sheds the blood of thousands, and another so placed that however angry he gets he will only be laughed at. But the little mark on the soul may be much the same in both. Each has done something to himself which, unless he repents, will make it harder for him to keep out of the rage next time he is tempted, and will make the rage worse when he does fall into it. Each of them, if he seriously turns to God, can have that twist in the central man straightened out again: each is, in the long run, doomed if he will not. The bigness or smallness of the thing, seen from the outside, is not what really matters.<sup>16</sup>

Augustine makes a similar point in his autobiographical *Confessions* when he tells of a time in his childhood when he stole pears from a neighbor, just in order to do something bad. Some readers of Augustine have found that story amusing, as if Augustine is making a big deal out of nothing. But most Augustine scholars agree that Augustine is purposely choosing a fairly innocuous story, both to avoid writing something sensationalistic in which sin starts to look daring and exciting and also to avoid painting sin as something exotic and unusual. He wants us to understand that the danger of sin is an everyday danger, and that the small everyday choices all of us make are harming us in ways that have eternal consequences.

Lewis stands in this same Augustinian tradition, and I believe that his account of Edmund’s sin is intentionally everyday – precisely the sort of resentful, envious bad temper that most of us know from our own experience and are quick to excuse because it’s so common and seems so small. Lewis wants us to see that there are no small choices.

[E]very time you make a choice you are turning the central part of you, the part of you that chooses, into something a little different from what it was before. And taking your life as a whole, with all your innumerable choices, all your life long you are slowly turning this central thing either into a heavenly creature or into a hellish creature: either into a creature that is in harmony with God, and with other creatures, and with itself, or else into one that is in a state of war and hatred with God, and with its fellow-creatures, and with itself. To be the one kind of creature is heaven: that is, it is joy and peace and knowledge and power. To be the other means madness, horror, idiocy, rage, impotence, and eternal loneliness. Each of us at each moment is progressing to the one state or the other.<sup>17</sup>

In his well-known sermon “The Weight of Glory,” Lewis points out that we should not only be concerned about our own progress – either toward being a heavenly creature or

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<sup>16</sup> *Mere Christianity*, pp. 72,73

<sup>17</sup> *Mere Christianity*, p. 72.

toward being a hellish creature. We should also be concerned with those around us. Are we helping them toward heaven or toward hell?

[R]emember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or other of these destinations. It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities, it is with the awe and the circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics. There are no *ordinary* people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations – these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit – immortal horrors or everlasting splendours.<sup>18</sup>

Lewis does a good job showing us Edmund's inner life, but he also hints at the fact that other people have some responsibility for the person Edmund has become. Toward the end of the book, we'll find a passing comment about Edmund's school and how much damage it had done him. Some of his siblings also see themselves as bearing responsibility for Edmund's character failings. This isn't to let Edmund off the hook, or to let ourselves off the hook when it comes to our own failures, but to make us take seriously the impact that we have on others around us. We help each other along the road, either to heaven or to hell.



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<sup>18</sup> "The Weight of Glory," in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*, ed. Walter Hooper, Rev. Edition (New York: Collier, 1980), pp. 18-19. 0-02-095980-X

## Chapter 8: What Happened after Dinner

### Background Information

Mr. Beaver says that “there’s never been any of your race here before,” but he’s wrong. Humans were present in Narnia on the day of its creation. Read *The Magician’s Nephew* for the story. Also, human pirates colonized the land of Telmar, a story that’s recounted in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*. Mr. Beaver is also wrong in spreading the Lilith story about Jadis, the Witch. We find out where Jadis is from in *The Magician’s Nephew*. Mr. Beaver is probably wrong about these things not because he’s supposed to be a misinformed or foolish character, but because Lewis hadn’t yet mapped out the whole series in his mind when he was writing this first book, so he didn’t know the right answers to these questions yet himself.

The name Jadis is based on the Persian word for witch.

Now that we’re getting further into the story, you may be tempted to think that you’re reading an *allegory* – that is, a story in which everything symbolizes something else. Lewis was very clear that he was *not* writing an allegory and that you shouldn’t try to read a lot of symbolism into the book. At the same time, there is a Christian message here, and it’s not hidden very deeply. Lewis said that once he had invented Narnia and started writing the story, he started to wonder what might happen if the Second Person of the Trinity were to be incarnate in Narnia the way he was in our world. He imagined that some things would be the same, other things would be quite different. So the story is not an allegory, but you should expect to see some parallels between the stories of Jesus and the stories of Aslan since, according to Lewis, they are the same person.

### Questions for Discussion

1. Mr. Beaver says to Peter, “It’s no go *your* trying, of all people.” Why do you suppose Peter is especially unfit to rescue Mr. Tumnus?
2. Look at the descriptions of Aslan and see how he is like Jesus and how he’s different.
3. Mr. Beaver says that “there’s no two views about things that look like Humans and aren’t.” In Narnia, things are supposed to look like what they really are. Is that a value in our world, or no? Should it be?

### Going Deeper

Remember that we earlier talked about how Lewis began writing this book by seeing a picture of a faun with an umbrella carrying packages. At first, all he had in mind were a series of pictures.

At first I had very little idea how the story would go. But then suddenly Aslan came bounding into it. I think I had been having a good many dreams of lions

about that time. Apart from that, I don't know where the Lion came from or why He came. But once He was there He pulled the whole story together, and soon He pulled the six other Narnian stories in after Him.<sup>19</sup>

Some of the places in the Narnia chronicles where Lewis describes Aslan sound very much like the description of the lion in Charles Williams' book *The Place of the Lion*. Williams was one of Lewis' very closest friends, and we know he had read that book several times, so it may be that the dreams about lions were coming in part from Williams' ability to describe a lion so grippingly.

Once the character of Aslan had come to him, Lewis was surely also aware that Jesus is referred to in the book of Revelation as the Lion of the Tribe of Judah (Revelation 5:5). In *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, Lewis works with the imagery of Revelation even more explicitly, since he has Aslan appear as both a lion and as a lamb. And, of course, the lion is the king of beasts. Once Lewis had started to see Narnia as a separate world and started thinking about the story, he wondered about his key question (What might happen if the Second Person of the Trinity were to be incarnate in Narnia the way he was in our world?), and it seemed clear that a Narnian incarnation would be as a talking animal. What animal would be more appropriate than a lion for the incarnation of the King of Kings? At the end of *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, Aslan tells the children that they will be able to meet him in their own world, saying: "But there I have another name. You must learn to know me by that name. This was the very reason why you were brought to Narnia, that by knowing me here for a little, you may know me better there." This is the most explicit connection that Lewis makes between Aslan and Jesus within the Chronicles themselves.

In describing Aslan to the children, Mrs. Beaver says that a smart person will tremble in Aslan's presence, and Mr. Beaver says that Aslan isn't *safe*, but he's *good*. Later in his life, Lewis explored this distinction more fully in his book *A Grief Observed*, the journal he kept after the death of his wife. In that journal he noted that a belief in God's goodness isn't always comforting in the way people expect it to be.

The more we believe that God hurts only to heal, the less we can believe that there is any use in begging for tenderness. A cruel man might be bribed – might grow tired of his vile sport – might have a temporary fit of mercy, as alcoholics have fits of sobriety. But suppose that what you are up against is a surgeon whose intentions are wholly good. The kinder and more conscientious he is, the more inexorably he will go on cutting. If he yielded to your entreaties, if he stopped before the operation was complete, all the pain up to that point would have been useless. ... What do people mean when they say "I am not afraid of God because I know He is good?" Have they never even been to a dentist?<sup>20</sup>

Lewis wanted to preserve a sense of awe and transcendence in his portrayal of Aslan, rather than offer a sweet, domesticated, safe understanding of God's nature. Aslan is "on the

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<sup>19</sup> "It All Began with a Picture . . ." in *On Stories and Other Essays on Literature*, ed. Walter Hooper (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982), p. 53. 0-15-668788-7

<sup>20</sup> *A Grief Observed* (London: Faber & Faber, 1961, 1966 edition). 0-571-06624-0

move.” He is at work, because – like the good surgeon mentioned above – he is unwilling to settle for anything less than a complete healing in the world of Narnia. As you read through this book and other Narnia stories, notice how often this theme returns of Aslan’s goodness expressed in his freedom, his sternness, and his unrelenting insistence on purging evil from his creatures.

It’s interesting to compare the portrayal of Aslan with the portrayal of Pan in *The Wind in the Willows* by Kenneth Grahame, a book Lewis admired very much. Mole and Rat have been drawn to a clearing by the music of pipes, a music that stirs up a great longing in them both. The description of longing is very similar to what Lewis describes as joy. As they come into the clearing, Mole experiences reverence and awe.

Mole felt a great Awe fall upon him, an awe that turned his muscles to water, bowed his head and rooted his feet to the ground. It was no panic terror – indeed he felt wonderfully at peace and happy – but it was an awe that smote and held him and, without seeing, he knew it could only mean that some august Presence was very, very near.<sup>21</sup>

Mole then has a vision of Pan, a mythical nature god who is a faun. Pan is described as “Friend and Helper,” and indeed he has helped a young otter for whom Rat and Mole have been searching and whom they now see sleeping between his hooves. But even though Pan is both friend and helper, even though he is described as “looking down on them humorously” and smiling, still this is not a casual encounter.

“Rat!” [Mole] found breath to whisper, shaking, “Are you afraid?”  
“Afraid?” murmured the Rat, his eyes shining with unutterable love. “Afraid! Of Him? O, never, never! And yet – and yet – O, Mole, I am afraid!”  
Then the two animals, crouching to the earth, bowed their heads and did worship.<sup>22</sup>

The combination of love and awe is similar to what Narnians experience in Aslan’s presence, and yet there is a difference in that Aslan is himself a real beast, an animal like themselves. For Lewis, it was important to describe an *incarnate* king, one who shares the nature of his subjects. In *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, the children come to an island where all the inhabitants have been placed under a spell of invisibility. Lucy breaks the spell, and at that point Aslan himself becomes visible. When she expresses surprise that any spell could affect him, Aslan answers, “Did you think I wouldn’t play by my own rules?” When God becomes a man in Jesus Christ, he agrees to play by his own rules for us, to subject himself to the same limitations that we face, to be like us “in every way but sin,” as the book of Hebrews puts it. In the same way, Aslan is a real lion, a real animal, subject to the rules put into Narnia at its creation.



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<sup>21</sup> Kenneth Grahame, *The Wind in the Willows* (Garden City, NY: The World Publishing Co., 1966 edition), p. 122. (Chapter 7)

<sup>22</sup> *The Wind in the Willows*, p. 123.

## Chapter 9: In the Witch's House

### Background Information

When Lewis spoke about the sorts of books he liked, he said that he didn't just want books with exciting plot; he was also looking for other things. He mentioned one very exciting book as an example, saying he didn't like that book at all because: "There is no country in the book – save as a storehouse of inns and ambushes. There is no weather. When they cross to London there is no feeling that London differs from Paris. There is not a moment's rest from the 'adventures': one's nose is kept ruthlessly to the grindstone. It all means nothing to me."<sup>23</sup> So notice Lewis's efforts to create different atmospheres as his characters travel from one place to another. Within the Chronicles, this is probably the most striking in *The Horse and His Boy*, which is set in Calormen and Narnia.

### Questions for Discussion:

1. Lewis says that "there's nothing that spoils the taste of good ordinary food half so much as the memory of bad magic food." Have you ever spoiled your taste for some ordinary pleasure by doing something you shouldn't have done?
2. When Edmund sees the lion in the Witch's courtyard, he is first afraid, and then when he sees that the lion has been turned to stone he mocks it. Where does that impulse come from to tear down something that seems great? To jeer and mock and deface? Have you ever found that impulse in yourself?
3. What do you think of Edmund now? Does he remind you of anyone you know? Are you ever like Edmund yourself?

### Going Deeper:

Edmund says that the Witch was "jolly nice" to him, "much nicer" than his family has been. Here we see the question of goodness from the other side. Aslan is not safe, and he isn't "nice" either, since "niceness" suggests an unwillingness to rock the boat, to confront problems, or to hold someone accountable. Niceness may sometimes be a way we express indifference. It is much easier to be nice to strangers than to the people we really love, because we don't actually care much about what they do or what kind of people they become.

Edmund's family has not been nice to him of late because they are disappointed in him, because they love him, because they are wishing that he will be a better person than he has been. In other words, his family has been showing some of the same implacability that Lewis talked about when he compared God to a surgeon who wants to make you healthy even if it hurts. Since his family members aren't perfect, they haven't done this perfectly –

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<sup>23</sup> "On Stories," in *On Stories and Other Essays on Literature*, ed. Walter Hooper (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982), p. 7. 0-15-668788-7

they've been expressing love and goodness, but also impatience and exasperation and confusion and hurt feelings. Still, most of what he's been encountering in them is goodness, which has felt neither safe nor nice. Evil is always uncomfortable in the presence of goodness, which is why Edmund was so uncomfortable at hearing Aslan's name.

Edmund's emotional state, especially at the beginning of this chapter, is a mixture of guilt, resentment, and self-righteousness, which are all functions of pride, leading him into self-deception. He's not seeing reality clearly any more, and he's certainly not seeing himself clearly. This isn't really surprising. Lewis says that one of the function of sin is to blind us to our own sinfulness. Only a virtuous person is able to know both good and evil.

When a man is getting better he understands more and more clearly the evil that is still left in him. When a man is getting worse, he understands his own badness less and less. A moderately bad man knows he is not very good: a thoroughly bad man thinks he is all right. This is common sense, really. You understand sleep when you are awake, not while you are sleeping. You can see mistakes in arithmetic when your mind is working properly: while you are making them you cannot see them. You can understand the nature of drunkenness when you are sober, not when you are drunk. Good people know about both good and evil; bad people do not know about either.<sup>24</sup>

Edmund is drifting further and further into badness, and so he understands what is happening less and less accurately.



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<sup>24</sup> *Mere Christianity*, p. 73

## Chapter 10: The Spell Begins to Break

### Background Information

Lewis tells us that Mr. Beaver is using bad grammar. Can you spot the error?

Some people think that Father Christmas doesn't belong here in this story – that he's a different kind of fantasy character than the fauns and dryads etc. and that Lewis is messing up the integrity of his fantasy world. Others argue that Lewis is drawing from all sorts of sources, so there's no problem with drawing from a more modern tradition as well. At least one possible explanation is found in a letter Lewis wrote to an American girl who had asked him about Aslan's "other name," since Aslan tells the children (at the end of *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*) that he is also in their world, but under another name. Here is Lewis's reply:

As to Aslan's other name, well, I want you to guess. Has there never been anyone in *this* world who (1) Arrived at the same time as Father Christmas (2) Said he was the Son of the Great Emperor (3) Gave himself up for someone else's fault to be jeered at and killed by wicked people (4) Came to life again (5) Is sometimes spoken of as a Lamb (at the end of the "Dawn Treader")? Don't you really know His name in this world?

So Father Christmas may just be in this story to help identify Aslan's other name.

The gifts that the children receive recur in later stories, especially in *Prince Caspian*.

### Questions for Discussion

1. Is Mrs. Beaver wise or foolish to delay their departure by packing?
2. Lewis says that Peter's voice sounded "tired and pale in the darkness," then adds, "I hope you know what I mean by a voice sounding pale." Do you? Can you talk in a pale voice?
3. What do we learn about the children from the gifts that they receive from Father Christmas?
4. Do you agree with Lewis that "battles are ugly when women fight"?

### Going Deeper

Some contemporary readers find a lot of sexism in C. S. Lewis's writing. Much of this is simply judging him by anachronistic standards. So, for instance, it's true that he typically uses the word "man" to refer to humanity and talks about "men" rather than "people," but then so did most people writing in English in 1950. However, such linguistic conventions don't account for all the criticism. Lewis does have some controversial opinions about

differences between men and women, and some of those opinions come out in the Narnia stories.

It is common today to believe that most differences between men and women are socially constructed, the product of how we have been taught to understand ourselves rather than differences that are inherent in us from our birth. In contrast, Lewis was an *essentialist*, believing there are essential differences between men and women that are part of God's good design for us in creation. Of course, lots of people (including me) are in the messy middle on this question, believing that there are some essential differences and some socialized differences, which leaves open the vexing and almost impossible problem of which are which. The older I get, the less I think I know about this.

Lewis, however, thinks he knows quite a lot. He expresses his sense of male and female differences very poetically in his novel *Perelandra*, in which his hero sees two spirits – one that symbolizes maleness and one that symbolizes femaleness. He also talks about these differences in an essay he wrote in 1948 arguing against the ordination of women. He doesn't mind the idea of women preaching, which he understands as the prophetic office, but he doesn't believe women should be ordained priests. (He was Anglican, so he used the word *priest* rather than *pastor*.) Here's the gist of that argument.

It is painful, being a man, to have to assert the privilege, or the burden, which Christianity lays upon my own sex. I am crushingly aware how inadequate most of us are, in our actual and historical individualities, to fill the place prepared for us. But it is an old saying in the army that you salute the uniform not the wearer. Only one wearing the masculine uniform can (provisionally, and till the *Parousia* [i.e., Christ's return]) represent the Lord to the Church: for we are all, corporately and individually, feminine to Him. We men may often make very bad priests. That is because we are insufficiently masculine. It is no cure to call in those who are not masculine at all.<sup>25</sup>

So apparently Lewis thinks of a sort of continuum of dominance with women on the most passive end and God on the other, most dominant end. Men are the mediators, who are dominant vis á vis women but feminine vis á vis God. I find this a very strange idea. It's worth noting that Lewis wrote this well before he met and married the by all accounts extremely dominating Joy Davidman.

I first read all the Narnia stories when I was a little girl, and I never felt that the girls in the stories were demeaned or treated as second class. Many of the female characters are very strong, characters I could admire and hope to imitate. As I've grown older, I've also gotten more comfortable with the idea that there really *are* some differences between men and women that should influence how we function in the world, so the role differences between the girls and the boys in these books don't bother me as much as they bother some people. However, if you're reading this story with children, especially older children, it might be a good idea to have some conversation about how you understand the differences between

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<sup>25</sup> "Priestess in the Church?" in *God in the Dock*, ed. Walter Hooper (GR: Eerdmans, 1970).

girls and boys. For instance: Is it fair that the boys have to risk their lives in war, but the girls don't?

C. S. Lewis has been one of the greatest teachers of my life, and I typically read him with what academics call “a hermeneutic of trust” – that is to say, I read him as generously as I can, with a teachable spirit, open to his ideas, and accepting that I bear the burden of proof if I'm going to disagree with him. There are very few areas where I *do* disagree with him, but this would be one. Of course, Lewis anticipated this sort of disagreement. In *Mere Christianity*, he imagined what a truly Christian society might look like, concluding:

If there were such a [Christian] society in existence and you or I visited it, I think we should come away with a curious impression. We should feel that its economic life was very socialistic and, in that sense, “advanced,” but that its family life and its code of manners were rather old-fashioned – perhaps even ceremonious and aristocratic. Each of us would like some bits of it, but I am afraid very few of us would like the whole thing. That is just what one would expect if Christianity is the total plan for the human machine. We have all departed from that total plan in different ways, and each of us wants to make out that his own modification of the original plan is the plan itself. You will find this again and again about anything that is really Christian: every one is attracted by bits of it and wants to pick out those bits and leave the rest. That is why we do not get much further: and that is why people who are fighting for quite opposite things can both say they are fighting for Christianity.<sup>26</sup>

As I understand this, it is important that we open our minds to those Christians who are fighting for things that seem opposed to what we're fighting for, so that we can be challenged out of our own parochialism and challenge them in turn. Maybe even C. S. Lewis needs to be challenged about a few things.



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<sup>26</sup> *Mere Christianity*, p. 66

## Chapter 11: Aslan Is Nearer

### Background Information

Lewis loved rural landscapes, the sort of nature found in rural England. His vacations were always walking vacations somewhere in England, walking from one small town to another, stopping at the pubs in between. I think you can see his love of this landscape in his description of the coming of spring. It's not that spring is morally better than winter, but people in many cultures have naturally associated the rhythm of winter to spring to summer as a rhythm that parallels the movement from death to new life.

Lewis also wants to retrieve the idea of nature as alive. This is an interest he shared with his good friend J. R. R. Tolkien, who went further than Lewis did when he created the Ents of Middle Earth. But Lewis also populates Narnia with tree spirits (dryads) and water spirits (naiads), all part of his effort to charge the universe with significance and meaning. He says: “[W]e have emptied the baby out with the bath. ... In emptying out the dryads and the gods (which, admittedly, “would not do” just as they stood) we appear to have thrown out the whole universe, ourselves included.”<sup>27</sup>

### Questions for Discussion

1. The Witch is nasty, but she gets Edmund to stop sulking, apologize, and eat his stale bread politely. What does this tell us about the value of fear?
2. When Edmund calls out to the Witch, begging her not to turn the little creatures into stone, Lewis tells us that “for the first time in this story” he “felt sorry for someone besides himself.” Do you know what it's like to feel so sorry for yourself that you don't notice anybody else?
3. Why is the Witch so threatened by the fact that Father Christmas has been to Narnia?
4. What is the significance of the thaw and the coming of spring?

### Going Deeper

In the well-known story of the Prodigal Son, the son who has wasted his father's money “comes to himself” while he is feeding pigs in a far country. The mists part, the lies are exposed, the illusions fall away. He sees what he really is, and only then can he repent and return to his Father.

Edmund has a similar moment of coming to himself in this chapter. “All the things he had said to make himself believe that she was good and kind and that her side was really the right side sounded to him silly now. He would have given anything to meet the others at this moment – even Peter!” He is beginning to let go of his resentment, his self-

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<sup>27</sup> “The Empty Universe,” in *Present Concerns*, p. 85.

justifications, his lies about his own actions. There can be no healing, until we admit that we are sick. In *Mere Christianity*, Lewis says:

Christianity tells people to repent and promises them forgiveness. It therefore has nothing (as far as I know) to say to people who do not know they have done anything to repent of and who do not feel that they need any forgiveness. It is after you have realized that there is a real Moral Law, and a Power behind the law, and that you have broken that law and put yourself wrong with that Power – it is after all this, and not a moment sooner, that Christianity begins to talk. When you know you are sick, you will listen to the doctor. ... Of course, I quite agree that the Christian religion is, in the long run, a thing of unspeakable comfort. But it does not begin in comfort; it begins in the dismay I have been describing, and it is no use at all trying to go on to that comfort without first going through that dismay. In religion, as in way and everything else, comfort is the one thing you cannot get by looking for it. If you look for truth, you may find comfort in the end: if you look for comfort you will not get either comfort or truth – only soft soap and wishful thinking to begin with and, in the end, despair.<sup>28</sup>

Intentionally or no, Lewis is citing the Heidelberg Catechism here. The first question and answer is, “What is your only comfort, in life and in death?” The answer begins, “That I belong – body and soul, in life and in death – not to myself but to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ ...” Less well known is the second question and answer of the catechism:

Q. How many things must you know that you may live and die in the blessedness of this comfort?

A. Three. First, the greatness of my sin and wretchedness. Second, how I am freed from all my sins and their wretched consequences. Third, what gratitude I owe to God for such redemption.

In order to get the comfort of faith, you must start with knowledge of your sin and wretchedness, or – as some translations have it – *misery*. Edmund has come to know his wretchedness and his misery, though he has not yet acknowledged his sin.

The fact that healing is starting is seen in Edmund’s new ability to think about someone other than himself and even to feel sorry for others. The opposite of pride is humility, which Lewis tells us does not mean thinking poorly of yourself but rather not thinking about yourself much at all. That is to say, the antidote to pride is thinking about other people and about the world around you. When the thaw begins, Lewis says that Edmund’s “heart gave a great leap.” He is now able to respond to the beauty and wonder of the world around him, which is another sign of healing.



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<sup>28</sup> *Mere Christianity*, p. 24-25

## Chapter 12: Peter's First Battle

### Background Information

At the end of the chapter, Peter is *knighted*. C. S. Lewis was a scholar who studied medieval literature, so he knew all about knights. He had also been a soldier in the first World War, and he had learned to respect the courage needed to go to war. He thought that children need to know about resisting evil, so he thought it was important to include genuinely evil characters in his stories and show genuine heroism.

### Questions for Discussion

1. "People who have not been in Narnia sometimes think that a thing cannot be good and terrible at the same time." What do you think?
2. Have you ever felt "glad and quiet," so that you were happy to be still without talking? What sorts of things make you feel that way?
3. Peter accepts partial responsibility for Edmund's actions, and Aslan doesn't contradict him. How might Peter be responsible?

### Going Deeper

In an essay originally published in 1940, ten years before this book, Lewis talked about the need to hold on to the medieval value of chivalry, which makes a "double demand" on our nature. "The knight ... is not a compromise or happy mean between ferocity and meekness; he is fierce to the *n*th and meek to the *n*th."<sup>29</sup> The ferocity is seen in the valor, courage, and strength of the knight in battle. But the meekness is also necessary, and is especially seen in that true knights are humble, patient, and quick to cry. Peter begins to put these two qualities together in this chapter. He saves Susan from the wolf, but after the fight is over Lewis tells us that "there was kissing and crying on both sides. But in Narnia no one thinks any the worse of you for that."

Lewis's point in his original essay was that for any one person to exemplify both ferocity and meekness is profoundly unnatural, and it requires a lot of social pressure to keep those qualities together. But it's valuable to everyone in the society to keep these qualities together. Those who are by nature fierce are taught to be humble and kind along with their ferocity. Those who are by nature mild-mannered are taught to be brave and principled along with their meekness. Lewis consistently teaches that if we want to cultivate a character trait in ourselves, we need to pretend we already have it. So if you want to become courageous, act courageous, and eventually the external behavior will work its way into your character. When social pressure encourages people to act in a chivalrous way, they are more likely to internalize chivalrous values.

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<sup>29</sup> "The Necessity of Chivalry," in *Present Concerns*, ed. Walter Hooper (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986), p. 13. 0-15-673840-6

In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, the chivalric tradition has fallen apart under the Witch's rule, so Aslan is re-introducing this tradition by training Peter and the other children in its values. The most chivalrous characters in the Narnian stories are probably King Tirian and his friend Roonwit the Centaur, who face the greatest threat in Narnia's history in *The Last Battle*. Roonwit tells Tirian, "Remember that all worlds draw to an end and that noble death is a treasure which no one is too poor to buy."

Responding to critics who thought that stories for children shouldn't include anything frightening, Lewis answered:

Those who say that children must not be frightened may mean two things. They may mean (1) that we must not do anything likely to give the child those haunting, disabling, pathological fears against which ordinary courage is helpless: in fact, *phobias*. His mind must, if possible, be kept clear of things he can't bear to think of. Or they may mean (2) that we must try to keep out of his mind the knowledge that he is born into a world of death, violence, wounds, adventure, heroism and cowardice, good and evil. If they mean the first I agree with them: but not if they mean the second. The second would indeed be to give children a false impression and feed them on escapism . . . . There is something ludicrous in the idea of so educating a generation which is born to . . . the atomic bomb. Since it is so likely that they will meet cruel enemies, let them at least have heard of brave knights and heroic courage. Otherwise you are making their destiny not brighter but darker. Nor do most of us find that violence and bloodshed, in a story, produce any haunting dread in the minds of children. As far as that goes, I side impenitently with the human race against the modern reformers. Let there be wicked kings and beheadings, battles and dungeons, giants and dragons, and let villains be soundly killed at the end of the book. . . .

The other fears – the phobias – are a different matter. I do not believe one can control them by literary means. We seem to bring them into the world with us ready made. . . . I think it possible that by confining your child to blameless stories of child life in which nothing at all alarming ever happens, you would fail to banish the terrors, and would succeed in banishing all that can ennoble them or make them enduring. For in the fairy tales, side by side with the terrible figures, we find the immemorial comforters and protectors, the radiant ones . . . <sup>30</sup>

Lewis doesn't glamorize war. His own experience in WWI was far from glamorous. But he thinks that it's a mistake to be so opposed to war that we also lose respect for courage and valor.

He's also unapologetic about the fact that the Christian tradition is not a pacifist tradition. Although there have been pacifist voices through the history of the church, they have always been minority voices. In *Mere Christianity*, he argues:

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<sup>30</sup> "On Three Ways of Writing for Children," pp. 39-40.

All killing is not murder any more than all sexual intercourse is adultery. When soldiers came to St. John the Baptist asking what to do, he never remotely suggested that they ought to leave the army: nor did Christ when He met a Roman sergeant-major – what they called a centurion. The idea of the knight – the Christian in arms for the defence of a good cause – is one of the great Christian ideas. War is a dreadful thing, and I can respect an honest pacifist, though I think he is entirely mistaken. What I cannot understand is this sort of semipacifism you get nowadays which gives people the idea that though you have to fight, you ought to do it with a long face and as if you were ashamed of it. It is that feeling that robs lots of magnificent young Christians in the Services of something they have a right to, something which is the natural accompaniment of courage – a kind of gait and wholeheartedness.<sup>31</sup>



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<sup>31</sup> *Mere Christianity*, p. 91-92

## Chapter 13: Deep Magic from the Dawn of Time

### Background Information

The Emperor-Beyond-the-Sea is Aslan's Father.

For the story of what happened "at the very beginning," read *The Magician's Nephew*.

In this chapter, the Witch serves the same function as Satan in the book of Job – she is the accuser.

### Questions for Discussion

1. What do you imagine Aslan said to Edmund during their conversation?
2. Have you ever made up with someone the way Edmund does with his brothers and sisters? Did you feel awkward, trying to think of things to say?
3. How has Edmund's character changed from what he was earlier in the story? What do you think has changed him?

### Going Deeper

Although the Witch and Aslan square off in this chapter, we mustn't make the mistake of seeing them as equal powers. The Witch's magic is to "make things look like what they weren't." The Witch's magic doesn't allow her to make new things but rather to tell lies about existing things, to create confusion so that others don't know what's real. Since her power is always to distort or twist what is already made, she is dependent on Aslan for her raw materials. In contrast, Aslan is the Good incarnate in Narnia. Along with his Father, he is the Creator of the world of Narnia. It is his nature to give life and to bring creatures into existence. The Deep Magic, which the Witch is trying to use, is rooted in his very character of justice and goodness. Lewis points out:

A sound theory of value demands .... that good should be original and evil a mere perversion; that good should be the tree and evil the ivy; that good should be able to see all round evil (as when sane men understand lunacy) while evil cannot retaliate in kind; that good should be able to exist on its own while evil requires the good on which it is parasitic in order to continue its parasitic existence.<sup>32</sup>

It is because Goodness can see evil so clearly that the Deep Magic takes evil seriously and requires a remedy.

Lewis believes that the Natural Law is one of the strongest evidences that we have for the existence of God. In both *Mere Christianity* and *The Abolition of Man* he points to the fact

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<sup>32</sup> "Evil and God," in *God in the Dock*, p. 23

that there are certain moral laws common to almost every culture in human history. He also points out that most people assume there is a standard of fairness and right behavior to which we may appeal when someone mistreats us. Where would we get the idea for such a standard, given that none of us lives up to the standard ourselves? Lewis believes that the existence of such a natural moral law points to the existence of a Law Giver. The Christian virtue of prudence (one of the cardinal virtues) is to see things as they really are and act accordingly. This is how we participate in goodness and bring our lives into harmony with the natural law. In Narnia, the Natural Law is known as Deep Magic.

In the musical *Narnia*, Aslan's conversation with Edmund – which Lewis doesn't tell us – is presented as a song in which Aslan tells Edmund that people must change “from the inside out.” It's a beautiful song, but I'm not convinced that Lewis would approve. In *Mere Christianity*, he suggests that most change is really the other way round – from the outside in. We behave as we should, and eventually our hearts change too. However, the change *does* eventually make its way into our hearts; otherwise, we're just putting on a show. He uses the analogy of being changed from statues into living beings through the power of Christ. We need to be fully transformed into his likeness in order to have a relationship with God.

The point is not that God will refuse you admission to His eternal world if you have not got certain qualities of character: the point is that if people have not got at least the beginnings of those qualities inside them, then no possible external conditions could make a “Heaven” for them – that is, could make them happy with the deep, strong, unshakable kind of happiness God intends for us.<sup>33</sup>

So the goal of the Christian life is to be transformed into a new kind of person. In order to live eternally with God in perfect joy and happiness, we need to become the kind of people who enjoy Goodness, who see things truly and live in harmony with God's design.



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<sup>33</sup> *Mere Christianity*, p. 63.

## Chapter 14: The Triumph of the Witch

### Background Information

Remember that this isn't allegory, so you won't find a one-to-one correspondence between the events of the gospels and the events in Narnia, but there are parallels because Aslan is meant to be Jesus as he would be if he had gone to Narnia.

### Questions for Discussion

1. Compare the story of Aslan's death with the story of the death of Jesus in the gospels.
2. Aslan is silent before his death. Why?
3. Aslan is "neither angry nor afraid." Could you imagine dying this way without being either angry or afraid? What does this tell us about Aslan?

### Going Deeper

In *Mere Christianity*, Lewis points out that repentance is the only way to solve the problem of our sin, but repentance is hard.

Only a bad person needs to repent: only a good person can repent perfectly. The worse you are the more you need it and the less you can do it. The only person who could do it perfectly would be a perfect person – and he would not need it.

Remember, this repentance, this willing submission to humiliation and a kind of death, is not something God demands of you before He will take you back and which He could let you off if He chose: it is simply a description of what going back to Him is like. If you ask God to take you back without it, you are really asking Him to let you go back without going back. It cannot happen. Very well, then, we must go through with it. But the same badness which makes us need it, makes us unable to do it. Can we do it if God helps us? Yes, but what do we mean when we talk of God helping us? We mean God putting into us a bit of Himself, so to speak. He lends us a little of His reasoning powers and that is how we think: He puts a little of His love into us and that is how we love one another. When you teach a child writing, you hold its hand while it forms the letters: that is, it forms the letters because you are forming them. We love and reason because God loves and reasons and holds our hand while we do it. But unfortunately we now need God's help in order to do something which God, in His own nature, never does at all – to surrender, to suffer, to submit, to die. Nothing in God's nature corresponds to this process at all. So that the one road for which we now need God's leadership most of all is a road God, in His own nature, has never walked. God can share only what He has: this thing, in His own nature, He has not.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> *Mere Christianity*, p. 45.

This is a clear and classic statement of why the incarnation is necessary for our salvation. God becomes a human being in Jesus Christ in order to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves – to repent perfectly, to submit fully to God’s will, to die to the old self and rise to the new.

But here’s something interesting about Narnia. Aslan does not become an animal in order to save anyone. He is an animal already. In fact, we know from *The Magician’s Nephew*, that Aslan was already a lion at the creation of this world, when he sang it into being. This is a way in which Narnia is not exactly like our world.

And yet it may tell us something about our world. There is a long-standing tradition in Christian thought that the incarnation would have happened anyway, even if there had been no sin, just so that we could come to know God more intimately. Obviously, this is very speculative. Whenever we are thinking about what *would have been if only*, we are on shaky ground. But there is a valuable insight behind this speculation: that the incarnation is not only valuable because Jesus dies; it is also valuable because he is “the exact imprint” of his Father (Hebrews 1) and so makes God known to us with new immediacy, as bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh.



## Chapter 15: Deeper Magic from Before the Dawn of Time

### Background Information

Remember that in the gospels, the women are the last at the cross and the first at the tomb. So too in Narnia.

Lewis himself lost his mother when he was quite young, and seems to tap into that memory to describe the grief of Susan and Lucy at the death of Aslan.

In *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* we find out that the service the mice give to Aslan changes their history in Narnia forever after. Can you think of any other story about a lion and a mouse?

### Questions for Discussion

1. Do you know what Lewis means by the “sort of quietness” that comes after you’ve been crying in grief all night?
2. Compare the story of Aslan’s return with the resurrection stories in the gospels.
3. Why does Aslan lick Lucy’s forehead after she asks whether he’s a ghost?
4. For Harry Potter fans, how is the “deeper magic” that Aslan talks about like the deep magic that protects Harry from Voldemort? How is it different?
5. Lucy thinks that romping with Aslan is both like playing with a thunderstorm and playing with a kitten. How can it be both? What do you imagine this would be like? What would it be like to ride on Aslan’s back?

### Going Deeper

One of Lewis’ concerns is that so many modern people equate religion with joylessness, with dour rule keeping.

There is a story about a schoolboy who was asked what he thought God was like. He replied that, as far as he could make out, God was “The sort of person who is always snooping round to see if anyone is enjoying himself and then trying to stop it.” And I am afraid that is the sort of idea that the word Morality raises in a good many people’s minds: something that interferes, something that stops you having a good time.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> *Mere Christianity*, p. 55.

One of Lewis's goals in writing the Narnia stories was to present a more joyful understanding of faith. Throughout the Narnia books, Aslan is often a subversive force, even inviting children to leave school in order to play with him. So it's not an accident that the first thing he does after his return to life is not fight a battle, but rather indulge in a great romp – a time of joyful play.

Real goodness is joyful, beautiful, and wondrous. As the Westminster Catechism tells us, the goal of our life is to *enjoy* God forever.<sup>36</sup> This isn't the enjoyment of refined self-conscious people who are worried about what they look like and what other people are thinking of them. Rather, it's the enjoyment of self-abandon, a complete lack of self-consciousness combined with the delight of participating in God's own life.

One element of the romp is the affirmation of Aslan's powerful physicality. The new life that we receive from God doesn't replace our physical life. We look forward to a resurrected life in which our bodies are what they were meant to be – vibrant, strong, graceful, powerful, moving in harmony with the world around us. We look forward to a resurrected life that is *more* concrete, *more* real, *more* glorious than anything we can experience now. This Narnian romp is a gesture in that direction.



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<sup>36</sup> Westminster Larger Catechism, Q&A 1.

## Chapter 16: What Happened about the Statues

### Background Information

Again notice that the girls don't fight. They get off Aslan's back before he goes into battle.

### Questions for Discussion

1. If you've read the Harry Potter books, you've already met centaurs and giants. How are those creatures the same in Narnia, and how are they different?
2. Aslan changes the white, silent courtyard into a colorful, noisy place. When you think about the effects of Christianity in the world, do you imagine that the spread of the gospel will make the world more varied and more noisy? Or do you imagine that the spread of the gospel will make the world more the same and more quiet?
3. Look through this chapter and notice how Aslan gives every creature a job to do that fits that creature's design. How many different jobs can you find creatures doing?

### Going Deeper

One of the most interesting connections between *Mere Christianity* and *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* is found in the image of statues. In the story, the Witch's deadening power is seen in that she turns living creatures into statues of stone; Aslan's power is seen in that his breath turns them from stone to living flesh. In *Mere Christianity*, Lewis uses the image of a statue in a slightly different, but related way. First, he makes a distinction between "making" and "begetting" to show that we humans (who are made) are not in the same relationship to the Father as the Son (who is begotten).

What God begets is God; just as what man begets is man. What God creates is not God; just as what man makes is not man. That is why men are not Sons of God in the sense that Christ is. They may be like God in certain ways, but they are not things of the same kind. They are more like statues or pictures of God.

A statue has the shape of a man but it is not alive. In the same way, man has ... the "shape" or likeness of God, but he has not got the kind of life God has.<sup>37</sup>

We are related to God, since he designed us, but we don't share in God's life fully. We have biological life, but not spiritual life. But the promise of Christianity is that someday we'll have spiritual life too. "This world is a great sculptor's shop. We are the statues and there is a rumour going round the shop that some of us are some day going to come to life."<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> *Mere Christianity*, p. 122.

<sup>38</sup> *Mere Christianity*, p. 124.

One interesting thing about this metaphor is that Lewis seems to be talking about a transcending of our creatureliness as well as a healing of our sinfulness. There are two gaps that separate us from God. The most obvious is our sin, but even if we were sinless people we would still be separated from God by our finitude. This, by the way, is one reason that some theologians have thought that the incarnation would have happened even if humans had never sinned, in order to bring this Creator/creature gap. Even though I'm not aware of anyplace where Lewis explicitly suggests that the incarnation would have occurred even without sin, he is certainly setting up that possibility by the way he analyzes our problem.

Now, back to the story. Aslan breathes on the statues to bring them back to life. This evokes two things: the breath that God breathed into Adam at creation, and the breath of Jesus on his disciples when he said, "Receive the Holy Spirit." The result of Aslan's breath is a transformation from stone into flesh, reminding us of the Biblical promise to replace our hearts of stone with hearts of flesh. The book of Hebrews says that this promise is fulfilled in the new covenant in Jesus Christ, that the old covenant (on tablets of stone) is now transformed into a living covenant, in which God's will is written on our hearts. Lewis puts it this way:

We are not begotten by God, we are only made by Him: in our natural state we are not sons of God, only (so to speak) statues. We have not got *Zoe* or spiritual life: only *Bios* or biological life which is presently going to run down and die. Now the whole offer which Christianity makes is this: that we can, if we let God have His way, come to share in the life of Christ. If we do, we shall then be sharing a life which was begotten, not made, which always has existed and always will exist. Christ is the Son of God. If we share in this kind of life we also shall be sons of God. We shall love the Father as He does and the Holy Ghost will arise in us. He came to this world and became a man in order to spread to other men the kind of life He has – by what I call "good infection." Every Christian is to become a little Christ. The whole purpose of becoming a Christian is simply nothing else.<sup>39</sup>

For it is now no longer we who live, but Christ who lives in us, transforming us into his likeness from one degree of glory to another.



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<sup>39</sup> *Mere Christianity*, pp. 137-138.

## Chapter 17: The Hunting of the White Stag

### Background Information

Note the reference to the feeding of the 5000, sitting down on the grass, with Aslan providing for their needs.

In *The Silver Chair* we read more about a “horrid school” and how it can ruin a good student.

In *The Last Battle*, we’ll find out more about what it means to say “Once a king or queen in Narnia, always a king or queen.”

*The Horse and His Boy* is set during this time when Peter, Susan, Edmund and Lucy were kings and queens in Narnia.

Remember that Mr. Tumnus already told us some things about the White Stag.

See *The Magician’s Nephew* to find out how the Professor knows about Narnia.

### Questions for Discussion

1. For the first time in the book, Lucy fails to be a model and is even chastised by Aslan. What was she doing that was so wrong?
2. Susan and Lucy disagree about whether Edmund should be told of Aslan’s sacrifice. Who do you think is wiser about this?
3. What do you think of the good laws that the kings and queens made? Can you tell that Lewis didn’t like school very much?
4. How have the four children changed over the course of the book? Which one do you identify with the most now?

### Going Deeper

Aslan’s renewing work is so effective that Edmund – the surly, resentful, annoying boy from the beginning of the book – is now a hero. He’s become a truly humble person, someone who’s sufficiently self-forgetful that he’s willing to lay down his life for others. He’s also wise enough – *prudent* enough, clear-sighted enough – that he fights the Witch intelligently, going after her wand rather than attacking her directly, which is what everyone else had been doing. His sisters now recognize him as his “real old self again.” So in losing himself, he has found himself. This is just what Lewis teaches us to expect:

The more we get what we now call “ourselves” out of the way and let Him take us over, the more truly ourselves we become. There is so much of Him that millions

and millions of “little Christs,” all different, will still be too few to express Him fully. He made them all. He invented – as an author invents characters in a novel – all the different men that you and I were intended to be. In that sense our real selves are all waiting for us in Him. It is no good trying to “be myself” without Him. The more I resist Him and try to live on my own, the more I become dominated by my own heredity and upbringing and surroundings and natural desires. In fact what I so proudly call “Myself” becomes merely the meeting place for trains of events which I never started and which I cannot stop. ... I am not, in my natural state, nearly so much of a person as I like to believe: most of what I call “me” can be very easily explained. It is when I turn to Christ, when I give myself up to His Personality, that I first begin to have a real personality of my own.

For Edmund, this developing of a real personality also means that now he can “look you in the face.” Because he is no longer self-absorbed, he can take an interest in others.

Peter has also found himself. He is described as looking “stern,” a word we usually use in a negative way, but which Lewis intends as a positive. Being stern is the mark of a king. Although he is still a boy in our world, in Narnia he has become an adult and is about to be a ruler. Lewis had little patience with our modern desire to keep everyone at the same level. He said, “Where men are forbidden to honour a king they honour millionaires, athletes, or film stars instead: even famous prostitutes or gangsters. For spiritual nature, like bodily nature, will be served; deny it food and it will gobble poison.”<sup>40</sup>

Ultimately, however, we are all invited to be kings and queens in Narnia – and in our own world too. For we are a royal priesthood, and part of being made into “little Christs” is that we take responsibility to be His representatives in the world.



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<sup>40</sup> “Equality,” from *Present Concerns*, p.20.

## Other Resources

Most American sets of the Narnia books are now arranged in the order that the books happen in Narnian history, beginning with *The Magician's Nephew*, which tells the story of Narnia's creation. However, I think the books are best read in the order that Lewis wrote and published them, since that way they progress in spiritual complexity from the most basic to the most complex. That order is:

*The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950)  
*Prince Caspian: The Return to Narnia* (1951)  
*The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (1952)  
*The Silver Chair* (1953) – actually written 5th  
*The Horse and His Boy* (1954) – actually written 4<sup>th</sup>  
*The Magician's Nephew* (1954)  
*The Last Battle* (1956)

Lewis's other novels are:

the space trilogy (*Out of the Silent Planet; Perelandra; That Hideous Strength*)  
*Till We Have Faces* (based on the legend of Cupid and Psyche)  
*The Screwtape Letters*  
*The Great Divorce*

### Books about Lewis and the Narnian Chronicles

*The Land of Narnia* by Brian Sibley, with illustrations by Pauline Baynes (New York: Harper & Row, 1990). 0-06-025625-7 A beautifully illustrated book that surveys all seven chronicles while offering some biographical background information about C. S. Lewis.

*Further Up and Further In: Understanding C. S. Lewis's The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, by Bruce Edwards (Broadman and Holman, 2005).

*Not a Tame Lion: The Spiritual World of Narnia*, also by Bruce Edwards (Tyndale, 2005). A broader book than the above.

*The Man Who Created Narnia: The Story of C. S. Lewis*, by Michael Coren (Eerdmans, 1996). 0-802803822-7. A simple biography of Lewis, suitable for middle school children, with lots of photographs.

*Past Watchful Dragons: The Narnian Chronicles of C. S. Lewis* by Walter Hooper (New York: Collier Books, 1979). 0-02-051970-2.

*The Way into Narnia: A Reader's Guide* by Peter J. Schakel (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005). 0-8028-2984-8. Schakel offers an insightful chapter on each of the Chronicles, highlighting many of the spiritual themes.

I recommend avoiding the A. N. Wilson biography of C. S. Lewis, which is pretty hostile. If you want to read a biography, look for the one by Lewis's friend George Sayer, or – better yet – read Lewis's autobiography *Surprised by Joy*.

### **Movies**

Adults might want to watch the movie *Shadowlands*, about Lewis's relationship with his wife Joy and the effects of her death on his life. The movie is not entirely accurate, but it does use many of Lewis's own words and is a creative insight into his life. There is also an earlier version of the play filmed for BBC television that is slightly more accurate, though the production levels are lower.

Wonderworks & the BBC produced three movies about the Chronicles.

*The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*

*Prince Caspian & the Voyage of the Dawn Treader*

*The Silver Chair*

The movies are fairly accurate, but the puppets used to portray the animal characters are not very convincing. Many readers would prefer to keep their own image of Aslan, rather than replace it with the very stilted puppet version of these movies.

There's a documentary about C. S. Lewis called *The Magic Never Ends* which has received some airplay on PBS.

PBS also released a documentary last year comparing the thought of C. S. Lewis with the thought of Sigmund Freud: *The Question of God: C. S. Lewis and Sigmund Freud Debate God, Love, Sex, and the Meaning of Life*. Find info at:  
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/questionofgod/index.html>

**THE BIG NEWS:** Disney is releasing a new version of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* on December 9, 2005. Here Aslan will not be a puppet, and the production values will be very high. The movie website is: <http://www.narnia.com> (or <http://adisney.go.com/disneypictures/narnia/index.html>). There are already some trailers posted – which are very impressive! Much of the movie was filmed in New Zealand, and the scenery is gorgeous. It appears, however, that the battle scenes are going to be much more central to the movie than they are to the book.

### **Websites**

Into the Wardrobe, probably the best all-around Lewis website on the net:  
<http://cslewis.drzeus.net> This site includes lots of pictures and even audio clips of Lewis' voice!

The C. S. Lewis Foundation, an organization that promotes the vision of C. S. Lewis:  
<http://www.cslewis.org>

Narnia on Tour – an outreach of Matthew House ministries, offering great articles and events about Narnia: <http://www.narniaontour.com/about.htm>