



EXCERPTS FROM

MERE CHRISTIANITY

BY CS LEWIS

Giving All To Christ

Renovaré Devotional Classics | Preparing for the Spiritual Life

9/16/2018 @ 10.00 am

Epiphany Neighborhood Seminary

Forum Series on Spiritual Formation

Background

CS Lewis (1898-1963) will be remembered as one of the most important Christian thinkers of the twentieth century. He was born in Ireland in 1898, and the major part of his adult years was spent as a Fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford, where he taught medieval literature. It was in 1931 that he was “surprised by joy,” Lewis’ own description of his conversion to Christianity. A brilliant scholar and writer, Lewis used his talents to reach thousands through the printed and spoken word.

He and a group of friends (including JRR Tolkien, author of *Lord of Rings*) gathered once a week to share their writings. During those years Lewis produced his famous work *The Screwtape Letters*. In the early 1940s he delivered talks on various Christian topics on British radio. His fame grew throughout Great Britain and spread to the United States. Out of those talks came the book *Mere Christianity*, a penetrating work on Christian apologetics. Countless Christians point to this book as an essential part of their faith journey. In the following passage Lewis discusses the questions, Is Christianity hard or easy?

Reflections

The contrast between God’s way of doing things and our way is never more acute than in this area of human change and transformation. We focus on specific actions; God focuses on us. We work from the outside in; God works from the inside out. We try; God transforms.

Jim Smith (co-editor of *Devotional Classics*) writes about this devotional taken from *Mere Christianity*, “When I read this essay, I was brought to my knees. I could hardly finish it. I suddenly knew what was wrong: I had been using my ‘natural self’ as the starting point. I had been trying to keep myself and its desires intact. Christ was merely an addition to myself. After reading this selection, I resolved to live each day consciously listening to the voice of Christ and letting the new self – the one that Christ gives me – come to life.”

Richard Foster

1. HOW MUCH OF MYSELF MUST I GIVE?

The ordinary idea which we all have before we become Christians is this. We take as the starting point our ordinary self with its various desires and interests. We then admit that something else – call it “morality” or “decent behavior,” or “the good of society” – has claims on this self: claims which interfere with its own desires. What we mean by “being good” is giving in to those claims. Some of the things the ordinary self-wanted to do turn out to be what we call “wrong”: well, we must give them up. Other things turn out to be what we call “right”: well, we shall have to do them.

But we are hoping all the time that when all the demands have been met, the poor natural self will still have some chance, and some time, to get on with its own life and do what it likes. In fact, we are very like an honest man paying his taxes. He pays them all right, but he does hope that there will be enough left over for him to live on. Because we are still taking our natural self as the starting point.

2. Two Results

As long as we are thinking that way, one or the other of two results is likely to follow. Either we give up trying to be good, or else we become very unhappy indeed. For, make no mistake: if you are really going to try to meet all the demands made on the natural self, it will not have enough left over to live on. The more you obey your conscience, the more your conscience will demand of you. And your natural self, which is thus being starved and hampered and worried at every turn, will get angrier and angrier.

In the end, you will either give up trying to be good, or else become one of those people who, as they say, “live for others” but always in a discontented, grumbling way – always wondering why the others do not notice it more and always making a martyr of yourself. And once you have become that you will be a far greater pest to anyone who has to live with you than you would have been if you had remained frankly selfish.

3. Harder and Easier

The Christian way is different: harder, and easier. Christ says, “Give me All. I don’t want so much of your time and so much of your money and so much of your work: I want You. I have not come to torment your natural self, but to kill it. No half-measures are any good. I don’t want to cut off the branch here and a branch there, I want to have the whole tree down. Hand over the whole natural self, all the desires which you think innocent as well as the ones you think wicked – the whole outfit. I will give you a new self instead. In fact, I will give you Myself: my own will shall become yours.”

Both harder and easier than what we are all trying to do. You have noticed, I expect, that Christ Himself sometimes describes the Christian way as very hard, sometimes as very easy. He says, “Take up your Cross” – in other words, it is like going to be beaten to death in a concentration camp. Next minute he says, “My yoke is easy and my burden light.” He means both. And one can just see why both are true.

4. The Most Dangerous Thing

Teachers will tell you that the laziest boy in class is the one who works the hardest in the end. They mean this. If you give two boys, say, a proposition in geometry to do, the one who is prepared to take trouble will try to understand it. The lazy boy will learn it by heart because, for the moment, that needs less effort. But six months later, when they are preparing for the exam, that lazy boy is doing hours and hours of miserable drudgery over things the other boy understands, and positively enjoys, in a few minutes.

Laziness means more work in the long run. Or look at this way. In a battle, or in mountain climbing, there is often one thing which it takes a lot of pluck to do; but it is also, in the long run, the safest thing to do. If you funk it, you will find yourself, hours later, in far worse danger. The cowardly thing is also the most dangerous thing.

5. The Almost Impossible Thing

It is like that here. The terrible thing, the almost impossible thing, is to hand over your whole self – all your wishes and precautions – to Christ. But it is far easier that what we are trying to do instead. For what we are trying to do is to remain what we call “ourselves,” to keep personal happiness as our great aim in life, and yet at the same time be “good.” We are all trying to let our mind and heart go their own way-centered on money or pleasure or ambition – and hoping, in spite of this, to behave honestly and chastely and humbly.

And that is exactly what Christ warned us you could not do. As He said, a thistle cannot produce figs. If I am a field that contains nothing but grass-seed, I cannot produce wheat. Cutting the grass may keep it short: but I shall still produce grass and no wheat. If I want to produce wheat, the change must go deeper than the surface. I must be ploughed up and resown.

6. Listening to That Other Voice

That is why the real problem of the Christian life comes where people do not usually look for it. It comes the very moment you wake up each morning. All your wishes and hopes for

the day rush at you like wild animals. And the first job each morning consists simply in shoving them all back; in listening to that other voice, taking that other point of view, letting that other larger, stronger, quieter life come flowing in. And so on, all day. Standing back from all your natural fussing and fretting; coming in out of the wind.

We can only do it for moments at first. But from those moments the new sort of life will be spreading through our system: because now we are letting Him work at the right part of us. It is the difference between paint, which is merely laid on the surface, and a dye or stain which soaks right through.

He never talked vague, idealistic gas. When He said, “Be perfect,” He meant it. He meant that we must go in for the full treatment. It is hard; but the sort of compromise we are all hankering after is harder – in fact, it is impossible. It may be hard for an egg to turn into a bird: it would be a jolly sight harder for it to learn to fly while remaining an egg. We are like eggs at present. And you cannot go on indefinitely being just an ordinary, decent egg. We must be hatched or go bad.

7. The Reason the Church Exists

May I come back to what I said before? This is the whole of Christianity. There is nothing else. It is so easy to get muddled about that. It is easy to think that the Church has a lot of different objects – education, building, missions, holding services. Just as it is easy to think the State has a lot of different objects – military, political, economic, and what not.

But in a way things are much simpler than that. The State exists simply to promote and to protect the ordinary happiness of human beings in this life. A husband and a wife chatting over a fire, a couple of friends have a game of darts in a pub, a man reading a book in his own room or digging in his own garden – that is what the State is there for. And unless they are helping to increase and prolong and protect such moments, all the laws, parliaments, armies, courts, police, economics, etc., are simple a waste of time.

In the same way the Church exists for nothing else but to draw men into Christ, to make them little Christs. If they are not doing that, all the cathedrals, clergy, missions, sermons, even the Bible itself, are simply a waste of time. God became Man for no other purpose. It is even doubtful, you know, whether the whole universe was created for any other purpose. It says in the Bible that the whole universe was made for Christ and that everything is to be gathered together in Him.

8. Becoming a Part of the Plan

I do not suppose any of us can understand how this will happen as regards the whole universe. We do not know what (if anything) lives in the parts of it that are millions of miles from this Earth. Even on this Earth we do not know how it applies to things other than men. After all, that is what you would expect. We have been shown the plan only in so far as it concerns ourselves.

What we have been told is how we can be drawn into Christ – can become part of that wonderful present which the young Prince of the universe wants to offer his Father – that present which is Himself and therefore us in Him. It is the only thing we were made for. And there are strange, exciting hints in the Bible that when we are drawn in, a great many other things in Nature will begin to come right. The bad dream will be over: it will be morning.

...AND FOR A LITTLE EXTRA CREDIT...

- Biblical reading – Luke 14:25-33
- Audio recording: http://www.peterkreeft.com/audio/14_mere-christianity_org.htm

This is a recording made by Peter Kreeft, a philosophy professor at Boston and a regular contributor to numerous Christian publications and a student of CS Lewis.

Notes

Spiritual Formation Schedule

2018		2019	
9/16	10 am Lecture Preparing for the Spiritual Life* 12 pm "What Just Happened Here?" 3.30 pm Forum Rollover Conversation	1/13	10 am Lecture The Incarnational Tradition* 12 pm "What Just Happened Here?" 3.30 pm Forum Rollover Conversation
9/23	10 am Round Table CS Lewis Giving All To Christ* 3.30 pm Forum Rollover Conversation	1/20	10 am Round Table GK Chesterton A Magical Universe* 3.30 pm Forum Rollover Conversation
9/30	10 am Round Table St Augustine Complete Surrender* 3.30 pm Forum Rollover Conversation	2/10	10 am Lecture The Evangelical Tradition 12 pm "What Just Happened Here?" 3.30 pm Forum Rollover Conversation
10/14	10 am Lecture The Contemplative Tradition* 12 pm "What Just Happened Here?" 3.30 pm Forum Rollover Conversation	2/17	10 am Round Table Madame Guyon Praying the Scripture* 3.30 pm Forum Rollover Conversation
10/21	10 am Round Table Thomas Merton Ways of Meditation* 3.30 pm Forum Rollover Conversation	2/24	10 am Round Table John Chrysostom Sermon on Dying to Sin* 3.30 pm Forum Rollover Conversation
10/28	10 am Round Table Martin Luther Praying in Faith* 3.30 pm Forum Rollover Conversation	3/10	10 am Lecture The Social Justice Tradition* 12 pm "What Just Happened Here?" 3.30 pm Forum Rollover Conversation
11/11	10 am Lecture The Holiness Tradition* 12 pm "What Just Happened Here?" 3.30 pm Forum Rollover Conversation	3/17	Round Table Catherine of Sienna Overflowing with Love* 3.30 pm Forum Rollover Conversation
11/18	10 am Round Table Teresa of Avila Striving to Make Progress* 3.30 pm Forum Rollover Conversation	3/24	10 am Round Table Jeremy Taylor The Grace of Humility* 3.30 pm Forum Rollover Conversation
12/9	10 am Lecture The Charismatic Tradition* 12 pm "What Just Happened Here?" 3.30 pm Forum Rollover Conversation	3/31	10 am Round Table Dietrich Bonhoeffer Christ in Community* 3.30 pm Forum Rollover Conversation
12/16	10 am Round Table Catherine of Genoa Waiting Upon God* 3.30 pm Forum Rollover Conversation	4/14	10 am Presentation Spiritual Formation Conclusion: Dallas Willard The Cost Of Nondiscipleship 12 pm "What Just Happened Here?" 3.30 pm Forum Rollover Conversation