

A New “Screwtape Letter”

Jerry E. Hudson

(A retired president of Willamette University, Dr. Jerry Hudson has been serving as one of our elders at Westside here in Beaverton. We thank him for permission to circulate his new-found “Screwtape Letter” far beyond our congregation.)

During this past month our family group has been re-visiting C. S. Lewis’ “The Screwtape Letters.” If you haven’t read this since high school or college, it’s time to pick it up again. If you’ve never gotten around to reading it, now’s the time. Even though it was written more than sixty years ago it is current and timely and speaks to us to day. The main premise is that a senior devil, Screwtape, is sitting in the bureaucracy of Hell sending instructions to his young nephew, Wormwood. Wormwood is a junior tempter trying to win his “patient” away for the Enemy and the Enemy’s Son. Screwtape advises young Wormwood in the best ways of making sure that the patient’s soul is firmly in the hands of Our Father Below. Wormwood’s efforts are complicated by the patient’s annoying Christianity and the Enemy’s love for “the little vermin.”

With profound apologies to C. S. Lewis, I have just found in the attic of my mind volume two of “The Screwtape Letters” and since it involves instructions to Wormwood as he “works” on members at Westside, I thought it appropriate to share it with you. If you don’t like it or don’t agree with it, just let me know and I’ll try to get your reactions to the author if I can track him down.

FROM: Screwtape <scrwtape@hades.com>
TO: Wormwood <wormwood@beavertonusa.com>

My dear Wormwood,

How convenient that our Father Below has given us this new way of communication. I have sent you separately a software program that will allow you to decode new messages from me. The IT head of Tempters’ Training University assures me that this is the best way to protect our e-mail from the Enemy’s eyes. Although as old as the Enemy is, I doubt he understands this new technology anyway.

I want to give you the general outline of our most recent strategy, personally approved by Our Father Below, to prevent our patients at Westside from going over to the Enemy’s side. Don’t worry too much that the patient has decided to identify with the church there. In many ways it is easier to distract one who feels he has made some kind of commitment to the Enemy. This may cause him to stop asking questions, as well as convincing him he has arrived rather than being on the road toward something. He may also come to believe that his weekly attendance is sufficient to keep him in good standing.

The approach that offers the greatest chance of success is to orient your patient's spirituality around guilt. Pound away at guilt. Help him feel badly about not reading his Bible more, and encourage him to begin with Leviticus and Deuteronomy. The next week, pray more. The next week, give more. The next week, witness his faith more. A heavy enough dose of guilt and he may decide he can't stand coming to church, and that will make him feel even more guilt. Counteract any thoughts of good news and grace with a reinforcement of inadequacy and pressure. Sometimes others in the church will do such a good job of this that you won't have to use these arguments at all. Whenever possible, let the other side do our work for us.

Encourage the patient to compare himself with those around him in what passes for pews where he attends. As he gets to know others better he will find the church there, as churches everywhere, filled with imperfect people. Some of these faults will gradually become evident to him -- he will meet the vain, the lustful, the avaricious, the proud, the enraged, and the deceitful. One of two things will happen. Either his confidence will be shaken because he has placed his faith in the institution of the church rather than the Enemy, or he will be filled with pride because he will feel superior as he compares himself with others. Remind him that the church is not supposed to be a hospital for sinners but a museum for saints and those around him better shape up. Isn't it wonderful that we are not limited to being truthful?

Finally, until our next exchange, encourage your patient to utter strongly his sincere conviction that "Life's just not fair." This is a common complaint we delight in hearing from humans; indeed it is the most commonly uttered non-profane expression uttered by humans upon first entering our realm. Not giving us enough credit, they will tend to blame the Enemy for allowing circumstances that seem unfair to them from their limited perspective. As they become convinced that the Enemy allows injustice to prevail, a few apparent injustices will bring them running to our side.

Good luck in your labors. After you have completed your work among those we have assigned you, you will finish your apprenticeship and be ready for those who are more difficult -- those who struggle daily with their faith, who rely on constant prayer, who believe in some kind of indwelling Spirit -- but don't worry there aren't too many of them and it is a real thrill to bring them down. - <ja23hudson@aol.com>

(Cecil Hook; May 2003) []