

Study Guide for Chapters 4-6

Screwtape Letters Book Study | St. Peter & St. Martin of Tours Parishes

Lesson: Theological Anthropology

At the beginning of the session, we will consider the spiritual anthropology of the human person. A recording of this presentation will be available on the St. Peter Catholic Parish YouTube Channel and at www.ashtoncatholic.org/screwtape

Chapter 4 – Prayer

- 1) The general tactic advised by Screwtape in this chapter is to keep the Patient from the “serious intention of praying altogether,” and to get him to have what can be summarized as ‘unserious’ or ‘ineffective’ prayer. List out the qualities that Screwtape gives for this ‘bad’ prayer. What would the opposite of these qualities be? In other words, what are the qualities of a healthy habit of prayer?

- 2) Screwtape points out that seeking grace for action and virtue (good habits) should be replaced by the cultivation of feelings. Why are feelings a sure and easy distraction from real conversation and prayer with God? Why should we have a healthy distrust of our feelings? What are some things you can do to avoid falling into these temptations so that we encounter God, instead of cultivating feelings when praying? (HINT: Screwtape names specific ways to tempt us, so what are the opposite of those temptations?)

- 3) Why is the Incarnation (the Son of God taking on a Human Body and Soul, becoming a human person, that is Jesus Christ) such a blow to the powers of hell? What does this act by God do to help us generally? What about personally in daily life?

Chapter 5

- 1) C.S. Lewis writes this book in the late 1950's, and this chapter is referring to the start of World War II. Why is a war, which brings so much destruction and many acts of violence into the world, not as helpful as one might think from an eternal perspective? What good things can God inspire in the hearts of men and women when faced with adversity and threats to one's wellbeing and existence?

- 2) Why do you think Screwtape sees a slow death in a nursing home to be a greater aid to the purposes of Hell than a war? How has God made suffering and death an aid to us on our journey to eternal life?

Chapter 6

- 1) In this chapter and the previous one, Screwtape refers briefly to fear and how it can be used as a temptation. Many people today are suffering from fear, anxiety, and hopelessness. Name for yourself something that you fear, paying attention to where you experience anxiety or shame. How can one begin to overcome fear, anxiety, and shame with God's grace and growth in virtue?

- 2) Screwtape specifically mentions an important spiritual tactic – to distract us from God Himself, or the real, true difficulties, situation, and temptations we face. Our enemy, Satan and his minions, rather try to get us to focus on the state of fear we're in, the presence of anxiety itself. He basically tries to separate us from God by getting us to focus on the surface problem or state that we're in. How can we bring all these things back into conversation with God, to look at them with God, in the way that He sees? What gift and virtue has he given us in Baptism to be able to see our struggles in the light of our relationship with Him?

- 3) In the Gospel of Mark 4:1-20, Jesus tells the parable of the seed and the sower. What are the temptations mentioned by Screwtape in this passage? What is the remedy that our Lord Jesus gives us in the parable?

- 4) The last paragraphs of this chapter treats of the will (heart), intellect, and fantasy (imagination). What does Screwtape suggest about where the virtues should be 'pushed' or 'moved'? What does it do to us when the virtues are moved there? Why does God want our virtues to take root in the Will (heart)?