

SMALL  
GROUP  
GUIDES  
from HarperOne

HOW  
TO BE A  
CHRISTIAN

REFLECTIONS AND ESSAYS

*C. S. Lewis*

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## INTRODUCTORY QUESTIONS

1. Cultivated from C. S. Lewis's essays, articles, and letters, as well as his classic works, *How to Be a Christian* provides practical wisdom and direction on how we can nurture our faith. What topics do you hope Lewis will address?
2. What beliefs are central to your faith? What do you have questions or doubts about? How does your faith interact with your everyday life?

## ON WORKING OUT YOUR SALVATION

1. "Christians have often disputed as to whether what leads the Christian home [to Heaven] is good actions, or Faith in Christ" (p. 6). How do you handle this dispute? How does Lewis?
2. Lewis writes, "I think all Christians would agree with me if I said that though Christianity seems at the first to be all about morality, all about duties and rules and guilt and virtue, yet it leads you on, out of all that, into something beyond" (p. 8). Do you resonate with this statement about how one's understanding of the Christian faith evolves over time? Why or why not?

## ON BEING CONCERNED ABOUT MORE THAN THE SALVATION OF SOULS

1. Do you think that Christians place the right amount of importance on “saving souls”? If it’s of such great import, Lewis wonders how we can think about anything else but salvation—how do you respond to this?
2. How do you understand the relationship between your faith and your daily life? (p. 15). How does the former shape the latter? Can you point to examples in the Bible of this relationship?

## ON THE DANGERS OF POINTING OUT FAULTS IN OTHERS

1. “[God] loves the people in spite of their faults. He goes on loving. He does not let go. . . . He is *with* them far more intimately and closely and incessantly than we can ever be” (p. 27). What does this reveal about God? Why do we have such a hard time showing this kind of love to others?
2. Lewis suggests: “Abstain from all thinking about other people’s faults” (p. 28). Why is this good advice, and how well are you able to do this?

## **ON LIVING TODAY WHILE EXPECTING THE SECOND COMING TOMORROW**

1. About the second coming of Christ, Lewis writes: “[it] will come when it ought, we may be sure; but we waste our time in guessing when that will be. That it has a meaning we may be sure, but we cannot see it” (p. 32). How does this compare to how you personally understand the timing and meaning of the return of Christ?
2. What would it look like to “always take [the End] into account” (p. 38) in your own life? What would have to change? Is this approach helpful?

## **ON FORGIVENESS AS A NECESSARY PRACTICE**

1. “To believe in the forgiveness of sins is not nearly so easy as I thought. Real belief in it is the sort of thing that very easily slips away if we don’t keep on polishing it up” (p. 46). What does Lewis mean by “polishing up” our belief? What are ways to do this in everyday life?
2. “Real forgiveness means looking steadily at the sin, the sin that is left over without any excuse, after all allowances have been made, and seeing it in all its horror, dirt, meanness, and malice, and nevertheless being wholly reconciled to the man who has done it. That, and only that, is forgiveness, and that we can always have from God if we ask for it” (pp. 49–50). What about

this definition of forgiveness stands out to you? Why is forgiveness such an important part of living the Christian life?

### **ON DENYING ONESELF WHILE LOVING ONESELF**

1. Where does “self-love” [or, what we might call a healthy appreciation for oneself] (p. 53) fit in the Christian life? What does Lewis have to say about a proper approach to “self-love”?
2. “The wrong asceticism torments the self: the right kind kills the selfness. We must die daily; but it is better to love the self than to love nothing, and to pity the self than to pity no one” (p. 57). Does this statement help you think more fruitfully about striking the right balance between denying yourself and loving yourself? Why or why not? How does Lewis distinguish between “the self” and “selfness”?

### **ON DOUBTS AND THE GIFT OF FAITH**

1. In your own life, how do doubt and faith interact with each other? How might Lewis describe this relationship?
2. Lewis refers to Faith as both a “virtue” (p. 62) and a “gift” (p. 63). Describe some ways faith could look like either a virtue or gift.

## ON THE APPEAL AND CHALLENGES OF HOME LIFE

1. When calling Christians to a healthy view of “domesticity,” Lewis suggests that we need to “stop telling lies about home life” and, instead, “substitute realistic teaching” (p. 69). Why does it matter that we name these as “lies”?
2. Lewis describes five principles (pp. 69–74) that might help us embrace more “realistic teaching” about home life. Which of these was most helpful? Which was most convicting? How might these inform how we act within our particular homes this week?

## ON HOW WE SPREAD THE CHRIST-LIFE WITHIN

1. “In Christ a new kind of man appeared: and the new kind of life which began in Him is to be put into us” (p. 78). What does this “new kind of life” look like?
2. “There are three things that spread the Christ-life to us: baptism, belief, and that mysterious action which different Christians call by different names—Holy Communion, the Mass, the Lord’s Supper” (pp. 78–79). According to Lewis, how do these things “spread the Christ-life to us”? Which one could you more fully incorporate into your spiritual life?

### ON WHAT IT MEANS TO SAY, “TO LIVE IS CHRIST”

1. Lewis writes that there are “three kinds of people in the world”: those who “live simply for their own sake and pleasure,” those who “acknowledge some other claim upon them . . . and honestly try to pursue their own interests no further than this claim will allow,” and those who “can say like St. Paul that for them ‘to live is Christ’” (pp. 87–88). He also says that most of us fall into the second category. Do you agree? Have you ever met anyone in the third category?
2. “The price of Christ is something, in a way, much easier than moral effort—it is to want Him,” writes Lewis (p. 89). What role does our longing for God play?

### ON THE CHRISTIAN ART OF ATTAINING GLORY

1. What room is there within the Christian faith for you to desire your own good (p. 92)?
2. “I turn next to the idea of glory,” writes Lewis (pp. 104–117). Before reading these pages, how did you personally understand the nature of glory in your spiritual life? How do you understand it after reading Lewis’s interpretations?

**ON NOT FEELING THREATENED WHEN CHRISTIANITY  
REMAINS UNCHANGED WHILE SCIENCE AND  
KNOWLEDGE PROGRESSES**

1. Do you think this understanding of the relationship between Christian doctrine and the “increasing knowledge” in areas such as science still holds true today (p. 120)? Why or why not?
2. “It is religion itself—prayer and sacrament and repentance and adoration—which is here, in the long run, our sole avenue to the real” (p. 123). Do you feel like religion connects you to “the real”—that is, deep spiritual realities? Why or why not?

**ON THE IMPORTANCE OF PRACTICING CHARITY**

1. “Charity means ‘Love, in the Christian sense.’ But love, in the Christian sense, does not mean an emotion. It is a state not of the feelings but of the will; that state of the will which we have naturally about ourselves, and must learn to have about other people” (pp. 125–126). What distinction is Lewis making here between “emotion” and “will”? How do these definitions of charity and love compare with your own?
2. Lewis suggests that charity distinguishes Christians from non-Christians, especially when it comes to human relationships (pp. 128–129). How so?

## ON WHAT IT MEANS TO BE PART OF THE BODY OF CHRIST

1. “In our own age the idea that religion belongs to our private life—that it is, in fact, an occupation for the individual’s hour of leisure—is at once paradoxical, dangerous, and natural” (pp. 133–134). What is Lewis trying to say is the danger about keeping religion private? Do you agree?
2. According to Lewis, why is “the family” a helpful image of the Body of Christ? Why is it a better image than “a club” (p. 141)?

## ON PRACTICAL MATTERS ON BEING A CHRISTIAN TODAY

1. “Christianity *does not* replace the technical. When it tells you to feed the hungry it doesn’t give you lessons in cookery. If you want to learn *that*, you must go to a cook rather than a Christian” (p. 158). How does this quote clarify the role of Christian faith in contemporary society?
2. In this essay, Lewis answers seventeen common questions about the Christian faith in general and the Christian faith in contemporary society in particular. Which of these answers was most helpful to you? Why?

## FINAL QUESTIONS

1. Describe how you defined being a Christian before reading this book. How would you define it now?
2. What insights on faith do Lewis's writings inspire?
3. Which of Lewis's writings do you appreciate the most? Why? Do any of his claims frustrate you? Why?