

THE SCREWTAPE LETTERS STUDY GUIDE HANDOUT

Letter # 4

Themes- The subtle attacks against prayer life; the implications of not seeing God directly in prayer

Synopsis- C.S. Lewis reminds us in this letter how powerful and challenging prayer can be. First, we must realize that prayer is “painful” to Screwtape because this is where our fellowship with God occurs in addition to real change in the life of the believer. The challenging part of prayer is to understand the incredible variations of distraction which keep us from effective prayer and praying altogether. Screwtape desires the new convert to get “muddled” (confused) in his thoughts, moods, and bodily positions while praying. Due to his recent conversion he also should be encouraged to rely on how he feels while praying. The distraction can be furthered if Wormwood can get him focusing on spontaneous prayers. What is fascinating is how Lewis insightfully calls us to examine carefully who or what is the object of our prayers. As we are praying, what is the image of God that we have in our minds by which we direct our prayers? Are we being drawn into figures that resemble our childish descriptions of God? Might they be medieval or personally created representations of what we think God looks like? Lewis is drawing our attention to the necessity to stay focused not on what we create in our mind, but instead on the one who created us... “the completely real, external, invisible Presence”. One final thought obliges us to meditate on whether we truly want to experience the “nakedness of the soul” when we present ourselves vulnerable before Him. Lewis prompts us to recognize that sometimes we really don’t want to be fully exposed to the Lord and because of this we will avoid prayer.

In the second paragraph Screwtape makes reference and quotes from one of England’s poets (Coleridge). Samuel Taylor Coleridge was born in Devon County and lived between October 21, 1772 and July 25, 1834. Screwtape shows himself to be acquainted with English poetry as he quotes from Coleridge’s poem, *Pains of Sleep*, which was written in 1803 (partial quote from lines 3, 5, 9 of the poem). See answer to Question 4 of this letter for more information.

In the final paragraph Screwtape writes, “If ever he consciously directs his prayers ‘Not to what I think thou art but to what thou knowest thyself to be’ our situation is, for the moment, desperate”. This section is about praying in a way that recognizes our limitations of visualizing God for who He really is. This seems to be a loose quote by Lewis most likely from Dante’s *The Divine Comedy: Paradise*, Canto 33, lines 124-126 concerning his vision of finally seeing God. See answer to Question 9B for more info.

Theological Themes- An interesting theme that is touched on in the first paragraph of this letter deals with the underlying disdain that Screwtape and Wormwood have for each other. Their feigned pleasantries to one another are actually built upon a cloaked foundation of sarcasm (see Letter #22, paragraph 3 for one glimpse of the truth). If the virtues of heaven include love, selflessness, and good will, then we can surmise that the “virtues” of hell (demons) are envy, self-seeking, confusion, hate and a desire to consume (James 3:15-16; cf. Galatians 5:15). Lewis describes his perception of devils in the 1961 new Preface. He writes, “They have two motives. The first is fear of punishment: for as totalitarian countries have their camps of torture, so my Hell contains deeper Hells, its ‘houses of correction.’ Their second motive is a kind of hunger... their hunger is more ravenous and a fuller satisfaction is possible. There, I suggest, the stronger spirit... can really and irrevocably suck the weaker into itself... it is for this [hunger] that Satan desires all his own followers and all the sons of Eve and all the host of heaven. His dream is of the day when all shall be inside him and all that says ‘I’ can say it only through him” (page xi-xii). An illuminating glimpse of devilish “love” occurs in the first paragraph of Letter #31. We are

reminded by Lewis that beyond this fictitious banter, there do exist hosts of wickedness that never rest in their attempts to consume and devour (1 Peter 5:8; Revelation 12:4).

An important theological theme introduced in this letter is the ways in which we produce an image of God in our mind's eye. We will discuss in the questions about whether we can or can't see God.

Vocabulary-

Amateurish- having the faults or deficiencies of a novice; lacking professional skill or expertise

Cynically- bitterly or sneeringly distrustful, contemptuous, or pessimistic.

Luminosity- something that shines brightly or is illuminated.

Discreditable- bringing or liable to bring discredit.

Puerile- childishly foolish; immature or trivial.

Study Questions-

1. In paragraph 2, what can we learn by the fact that Screwtape encourages keeping the patient from prayer altogether versus God's instructions to us (Luke 18:1; Romans 12:12; Ephesians 6:18; Colossians 4:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:17)?
2. In paragraph 2, A) What significance is there in the comments by Screwtape where he encourages a prayer that is "spontaneous, inward, informal and unregularized"? B) Do you agree or disagree that this kind of prayer would be encouraged by God's enemies (cf. Matthew 6:5-9)? C) Explain what Screwtape means when he writes of the 'prayer of silence' that is used by those very advanced in the Enemy's service.
3. In paragraph 2, A) What does it mean when Screwtape describes the patient producing in himself a devotional mood? B) What is wrong or right about this? Does God care? And why the focus to keep his concentration of the will and intelligence having no part? C) Does bodily position make a difference (cf. Matthew 26:39; 1 Timothy 2:8; John 11:41-42; Gen 17:3; 1 Kings 8:54; Luke 18:10-13; 2 Samuel 7:18)?
4. In paragraph 2, Screwtape quotes from Samuel Coleridge's poem entitled *Pains of Sleep* (see Synopsis above for details). Comparing lines 3, 5, 9 with lines 14-15 of the poem, how does Screwtape seemingly misrepresent Coleridge (cf. Matthew 4:6 and Psalm 91:11-12)?
5. In paragraph 3, A) Why does Screwtape desire for the patient to try and produce *feelings* as it relates to prayer? B) How do feelings benefit or take away from prayer (cf. Matthew 26:36-39; Psalm 102:1-28; 55:1-23)?
6. In paragraph 3, A) How does trying to feel forgiven or brave or charitable detract from our prayers for those exact things? B) Is there a challenge discerning between human motivated fruit versus Spirit-motivated fruit (cf. 1 Corinthians 4:1-5)?
7. In paragraph 4, A) What does Screwtape mean when he writes that humans don't "start from a direct perception of Him" (cf. Exodus 33:19-20; John 1:18; 6:46; 1 Timothy 6:16; 1 John 4:12)? B) How did the apostles see God (John 14:7) and what should be our attitude (John 20:29; 1 Peter 1:8; 1 John 3:2; Matthew 5:8)?
8. In paragraph 4, what are the implications for us concerning the ghastly luminosity which brings permanent pain to devils (cf. 1 Timothy 6:16; Acts 26:13; 1 John 3:2; Revelation 1:16; Matt 5:8)?
9. In paragraph 4, A) Have you experienced the assorted descriptions written by Screwtape of creating various images of God in your mind? B) What is potentially wrong in participating in this sort of prayer (Exodus 20:4; Colossians 1:15; 1 John 5:20-21)? C) Discuss and/or meditate on Lewis' description of how we should direct our prayers towards the end of this letter.
10. In paragraph 4, A) Why does Screwtape say that we do not desire the real nakedness of the soul as much as we suppose? B) Is it true for you? C) How does this vulnerability affect us really getting to the foundation of authentic prayer (cf. Hebrews 4:13; Revelation 16:15)?

Letter # 4 Answers

1. The general answer is that because Screwtape is very determined to keep us from prayer it must be a good thing. We remember that in the world of the *Screwtape Letters* up is down, down is up, right is wrong, and wrong is right. All of these Scripture references focus our attention on the need to persevere in our prayers (Luke 18:1) as well as a life that is consumed with an attitude and discipline of prayer.
2. A) Answers will vary as the responses to this question will depend a lot on the religious background of the reader. For those raised in a more liturgical style congregational service, there might not be much significance or shock to this question. It is insightful to remember that C.S. Lewis attended services in the Anglican Church which has a strong liturgical bent in its religious life. Thus, for him there is a strong positive tradition in the reading of prayers versus spontaneous, formal, and regular prayers. The liturgy of the Anglican Church contains formal prayers for morning, evening, and a host of other situations. For those raised in a more non-formal tradition they most likely have been taught that formal prayers can become ritual prayers that should be avoided. For them, God prefers spontaneous prayers that originate from the heart. It is interesting that Lewis writes more about this in his *Letters to Malcolm*. The character which might or might not be a reflection of Lewis himself says his prayers have changed throughout his life from a more strictly liturgical expectation to something less. He writes, "I am not quite such a purist in this matter as I used to be. For many years after my conversion, I never used any ready-made forms except the Lord's Prayer... the choice between ready-made prayers and one's own words is less important for me than it apparently is for you. For me words are in any case secondary. They are only an anchor... It does not matter very much who first put them together. If they are our own words they will soon, by unavoidable repetition, harden into a formula. If they are someone else's, we shall continually pour into them our own meaning" (LTM, 11). B) Answers will again vary, but the passage in Matthew 6:5-9 speaks against praying repetitiously. Some will use this verse as a prohibition against formal, liturgical prayers in favor of spontaneous prayers. The response against this is that the main concern in these verses is the issue of the heart and it is possible to pray these prayers from the heart without seeking to be heard for the sake of many words. Additionally, for those in favor of formal prayers, there is wisdom in praying the words of their spiritual ancestors who have contributed to the tradition of the church. Either way, it is hard to believe that God would be displeased with heartfelt prayer of any type that seeks Him in a spirit of genuine humility. In *Letters to Malcolm* Lewis comments on the benefits of more formalized prayers when he writes, "First, it keeps me in touch with 'sound doctrine.' Left to oneself, one could easily slide away from the 'faith once given' into a phantom called 'my religion.' Second, it reminds me 'what things I ought to ask'... Finally, they provide an element of the ceremonial" (LTM, 12). Lewis writes further of the value of liturgical prayers to Mary Van Deusen, "The advantage of a fixed form of service is that we know what is coming. *Ex tempore* public prayer has this difficulty: we don't know whether we can mentally join in it until we've heard it – it might be phony or heretical. We are therefore called upon to carry on a *critical* and *devotional* activity at the same moment: two things hardly compatible. In a fixed form we ought to have 'gone through the motions' before in our private prayers: the rigid form really sets our devotions *free*. I also find the more rigid it is, the easier it is to keep one's thoughts from straying. Also it prevents any service getting too completely eaten up by whatever happens to be the pre-occupation of the moment (a war, an election, or what not). The *permanent* shape of Christianity shows through. I don't see how the *ex tempore* method can help becoming provincial & I think it has a great tendency to direct attention to the minister rather than to God" (CL3, 177-78). C) The goal for Screwtape is to encourage a fabricated devotional mood in prayer that superficially

resembles those who pray without words. Yet he says that there are those who can and do demonstrate a “prayer of silence” that is used by those very advanced in the enemy’s service. What he is getting at is the similarity and risk to believers in not distinguishing the powerful benefits of praying without words and the trap of simply creating a devotional mood. He expands in *Letters to Malcolm* when he writes, “For many years after my conversion...I tried to pray without words at all- not to verbalize the mental acts. Even in praying for others I believe I tended to avoid their names and substituted mental images of them. I still think the prayer without words is the best- if one can really achieve it. But I now see that in trying to make it my daily bread I was counting on a greater mental and spiritual strength than I really have. To pray successfully without words one needs to be ‘at the top of one’s form.’ Otherwise, the mental acts become merely imaginative or emotional acts- and a fabricated emotion is a miserable affair” (LTM, 11). Lewis picks up this theme later when he writes “When I spoke of prayer without words I don’t think I meant anything so exalted as what mystics call the ‘prayer of silence.’ And when I spoke of being ‘at the top one’s form’ I didn’t mean it purely in a purely spiritual sense. The condition of the body comes in; for I suppose a man may be in a state of grace and yet very sleepy” (LTM, 16). The “prayer of silence” is one that is accomplished through mental images accompanied by an intense concentration and spiritual strength. On the need for concentration Lewis writes, “I myself find prayers without words the best, *when* I can manage it, but I can do so only when least distracted and in best spiritual and bodily health (or what I think *best*). But another person might find it quite otherwise” (CL3, 237 italics his).

3. A) Screwtape is describing that the patient is inexperienced in prayer. Due to this, he will most likely fall back on the mood or emotions of prayer. He mentions this after discussing that the patient will be reacting against the parrot like prayers of his childhood. What we realize here is that Lewis is writing from the context of the formalized prayers of the Anglican Church for the patient. So, the patient will be reacting against formal prayers by coming up with his own spontaneous prayers. The formal prayer involves the will and intelligence as he would be reading them, but the spontaneous prayer will most often stem out of emotion or a devotional mood. B) Answers will vary about how much emotion plays into prayer. Does God care? It seems clear from Scripture that all sorts of prayers are recorded and answered by the Lord. You will be hard pressed to find any sort of formalized prayer in the Bible. Apart from the disciple’s prayer found in Matthew 6:9-15 which is a pattern anyway, most prayers are spontaneous and filled with emotion. A perusal through the book of Psalms is just one example. Lewis does bring up a good point about the overreaction from formalized prayer to one that is filled with all emotion (or mood) and not interacting with intelligence (or truth) and the will (making deliberate choices). God desires for us to worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:24) and as always there should be no overreactions in either direction, but a balance. C) When examining all these verses you will quickly realize that the prayers of the Bible include all sorts of bodily positions. It is not right to be dogmatic in demanding any one sort of bodily position as being better for prayer than others. Yet it is important to realize Lewis’ point as it relates to bodily position. The thing that matters to God is the right attitude, but for us bodily position might help us get into the right frame of mind for prayer. Take for example someone who is filled with pride and they are asked to get down on their knees in order to pray. They might struggle with how this looks or makes them feel when they would actually assume this position. However, this might be a great tool for when they are humbled in body, the humbling of the soul might follow. We see an example of something similar in the story of Naaman the Syrian who was told to go and dip himself in the Jordan river seven times to receive healing, but refused (2 Kings 5:1-14). His healing did come but only after he humbled himself and obeyed Elisha the prophet. The key in this whole discussion is not right or wrong as it relates to position, but to realize that what we do with our body can and does affect our

soul. Lewis discusses this elsewhere when he writes, “When one prays in strange places and at strange times one can’t kneel, to be sure. I won’t say that this doesn’t matter. The body ought to pray as well as the soul. Body and soul are both the better for it... The relevant point is that kneeling does matter, but other things matter even more. A concentrated mind and a sitting body make for better prayer than a kneeling body and mind half asleep” (LTM, 17-18).

4. One of the easiest ways to find a copy of this poem is to go to <<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/29090/29090-h/29090-h.htm>>. The poem is *Pains of Sleep* and is found on page 389. Following are the lines of the poem displayed which will provide opportunity for comparison (lines 3, 5, 9).

Lines

1. Ere on my bed my limbs I lay,
2. It hath not been my use to pray
3. With moving lips or bended knees;
4. But silently, by slow degrees,
5. My spirit I to Love compose,
6. In humble trust mine eye-lids close,
7. With reverential resignation,
8. No wish conceived, no thought exprest,
9. Only a sense of supplication;
10. A sense o'er all my soul imprest
11. That I am weak, yet not unblest,
12. Since in me, round me, every where
13. Eternal Strength and Wisdom are.
14. But yester-night I prayed aloud
15. In anguish and in agony,

The main point of this quote from Coleridge is to compare that the poem speaks of praying without moving lips and bended knees along with creating a mood of love and supplication. This would contrast with the formalized prayers and correlate with the patient seeking to create within himself a certain emotional state of prayer. What is not highlighted in Screwtape’s letter is that in lines 14-15 the poet abandoned this form of prayer for one that is rooted in the actual emotions of anguish and agony as opposed to a self-induced emotional state. The point of examining in detail the poem is to notice that the quote found in this letter actually is one that is taken out of context in a minor way. When examining both sets of lines, it is clear that Coleridge is not advocating only one form of prayer. Biblically, it is interesting to compare Matthew 4:6 and Psalm 91:11-12 in that Satan himself seems to misrepresent the Scripture as he quotes it (just like Screwtape does when he quotes Coleridge). Upon careful comparison, it is noted that Satan quotes the Psalm but leaves out the part about keeping the believer in obedience to God’s ways (Ps 91:11b; Matt 4:6). Whether this quote from Coleridge was an oversight by Lewis (doubtful in my view) or meant as an intentional misquote for the character Screwtape is unknown. Nevertheless, it provides a great opportunity for comparison of the ways in which Satan will do this exact thing.

5. A) Humans are complex and sometimes entertaining to observe. My mother-in-law died a few years ago and my youngest daughter was about 6 years old. When we told her that her grandmother died (they were not that close), she didn’t know how to respond. Subsequent to this when she saw others crying, it was very obvious that she didn’t want to be left out and worked herself up into passionate crying and emotion. The subject changed to something more interesting to her and she immediately was able to dry the tears and move on with excitement to this other activity. I don’t share that to be cold to my daughter, but to give an illustration (as most parents could) that we are not only able to do this, but often do this exact thing. Lewis does a great job at observing how we can be distracted by ourselves in seeking to produce the feelings for what we

are praying for. There is the action of being charitable and the feeling of charity; the action of being courageous and the feeling of bravery. It is important for us to seek God's help in achieving the action of what we are praying for and not to manufacture the feelings and think we got an answer to prayer. **B)** We have seen in the questions above how feelings (or emotion) can take away from prayer by distraction. However, it is profitable to remember that feelings can provide focus and intensity in our prayer life. They can actually produce the opposite of distraction by passionately driving us to the throne in the midst of hurt, pain, or grief. These passages (Matthew 26:36-39; Psalm 102:1-28; 55:1-23) show clearly how emotion can accomplish this exact thing of concentration in prayer. Yet there is always an inherent risk of mistaking the source of our feelings as they motivate us in our prayers. Lewis writes about this describing that some of our "worst" prayers (from our own assessment) might end up being our best because they are prayed without a large dependence on positive feelings. In these times we press through in prayer when we actually have feelings of not wanting to pray. He writes, "For these, perhaps, being nearly all will, come from a deeper level than feeling. In feeling there is so much that is really not ours- so much that comes from weather and health or from the last book read. One thing seems certain... God sometimes seems to speak to us most intimately when He catches us, as it were, off guard. Our preparations to receive Him sometimes have the opposite effect" (**LTM**, 116-17).

6. **A)** Continuing on this theme from the previous question we need to make sure that we understand the difference between subjective and objective positions. We might experience this when we sin and feel unworthy of being forgiven. When we go to the Lord in prayer we might walk away from prayer not feeling forgiven and mistaking that for whether we are objectively forgiven. The Scripture affirms to us in 1 John 1:9 that we if confess our sins we are objectively forgiven. This a great tension in the Christian life as it relates to a variety of virtues. Encourage the student to do a study on "positional truth" and compare this with our feelings. "I don't feel saved, loved, or accepted by God" are common perceptions that the truth of the Word will overcome (see **Theological Themes** of Letter #12). **B)** There is a challenge in this area because there certainly are many "good" people in the world who do good deeds or demonstrate love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, self-control (Gal 5:22-23). The real question in any of these is the motive or source of these virtues. Are they the fruit of the Holy Spirit or a desire to feel good, moral, or upstanding in our lives? I once witnessed to a classmate and she ended up receiving the message of the gospel and began attending church with me. Many months later, she was AWOL and when I approached her to inquire about why she wasn't attending church any longer, she responded, "I was doing a lot of bad things in my life and felt guilty, but now that I went to church for awhile, I don't feel guilty anymore, and so I don't need it any longer." I was shocked to the core, because I clearly communicated the gospel to her. While at church she was singing passionately with hands in the air, reading her Bible, etc. Yet she wasn't looking for the Savior, but instead a self-induced soothing of her conscious which she received. Paul's main point in this passage (1 Cor 4:1-5) concerning doing "virtuous things" revolves around motives. Paul reminds us that it is so difficult to discern fruit that he won't even judge himself, but instead will wait until the day that the Lord judges him. We need to be humble in evaluating others and ourselves while still pursuing the Lord.
7. **A)** Lewis is reminding us of the disadvantage we have in prayer because by necessity there should be some sort of object our prayers are directed towards. Yet none of us have ever seen God as all these verses attest. This provides for greater opportunity for the enemy to come in and divert our prayers to something other than God. The challenge for each of us is to be sensitive to not praying to an idol that we have created. We understand that God is gracious, but the point that Lewis is making is that once we have created an image we tend to continue to adapt that image as our spiritual life matures. It is possible to ask many Christians what their image of God is and find out

that many of them picture a wise old man with a long beard (i.e. Gandalf from LOTR). **B)** The Bible teaches us that God has spoken to our spiritual ancestors through a variety of mediums (Hebrews 1:1-2- dreams, visions, prophecies, theophanies, etc.), but has fully and finally spoken through His Son Jesus Christ. Jesus reminded the apostles that if they saw Jesus they saw God the Father as they are identical in their teachings, holiness, and other attributes. The only difference is that of the incarnation and we would do well to avoid praying to images of Jesus as a human. Scripture affirms that Jesus is the exact image of God the Father (Hebrews 1:3; Col 1:15) and so we should recognize that Jesus fully represents all that the Father is (Col 2:9; 1:19). The rest of these verses remind us that we are blessed if we believe in the Lord even though we haven't seen Him but still love Him. We will see Him one day (1 John 3:2) as well as God the Father (Matt 5:8). Our attitude should be one of gratitude, hope, and longing for that day when our faith becomes wholly realized.

8. The implications are that the devils know God and understand His brightness, but it is deemed unapproachable to them. What hope and joy we have in that God has called us His children; which in turn invites us into His presence where we will be able to see Him. What is ghastly for the demons who tremble (James 2:19), is warmth and joy to us who are found in Him! Even though we can't see Him now, we have the promise that one day we will see God fully (Matt 5:8; 1 John 3:2; Hebrews 12:14).
9. **A)** Answers will vary, but we should be honest in the ways that we have grown in our faith and prayer life. **B)** We recognize that God is gracious towards us in that He knows we struggle with trying to visualize the invisible God with our mistaken approaches. We learn from these verses that idolatry or false images are a sin to the Lord (Ex 20:4), that God is invisible (Col 1:15) and that we are called to avoid idols (1 John 5:21). Granted that idols are typically referring to man-made statues, the idea still includes anything that takes the place of our worship or prayer (see chapter 16 of **LTM**). **C)** It will be beneficial to allow students to discuss the ways in which they have experienced this. Encourage them to share which images they are picturing in their minds eye, to repent of this, and instead to focus on what Lewis describes in the last half of paragraph 4. One important point to make is how Lewis reminds us that we are always limited by the transcendence of God and our own lack of knowledge. Screwtape writes, "For if he ever comes to make the distinction, if ever he consciously directs his prayers 'Not to what I think thou art but to what thou *knowest thyself* to be', our situation is, for the moment, desperate" (emphasis mine). This is very insightful in that we should recognize that we can't claim to know or see God perfectly, thus we should humbly direct our prayers to what God knows about Himself. This is a quote or allusion from an unnamed author, but most likely comes from Dante's *Divine Comedy, Paradise*, Canto 33. We should not be surprised that Lewis would include a quote from Dante since he taught medieval literature most of his adult life. In Dante's *Divine Comedy* he has traveled through hell (*Inferno*), purgatory (*Purgatorio*), and now finally gets to see a vision of heaven (*Paradiso*) and God Himself. In Canto 33, he is describing this overwhelming sense of God's majesty, but even though he sees God, Dante still recognizes that the only one who comprehensively knows God is God Himself. He says, "O Light eternal, sole in thyself that dwellest, Sole knowest thyself, and, known unto thyself, And knowing, lovest and smilest on thyself!" (Lines 124-126). Dante describes God as the Eternal light whose existence is found in Himself alone. He is not dependent on anyone or anything for His own existence. He exhibits what modern theologians call the attribute of self-existence. The second description of God by Dante is what concerns us here. Screwtape comments that if the patient comes to the point of acknowledging his own weakness in prayer, but directs his prayers to the accurate vision that God has of Himself, then Wormwood is in trouble. It's at this moment that the patient is recognizing that his prayers should be directed toward God's self-understanding and not to his own inferior

(and potentially idolatrous) conception of who God has revealed Himself to be. Screwtape is concerned that the patient might reiterate his thoughts as when Dante speaks to God, “O Light eternal who alone *knowest thyself* and who is known only to thyself”. As we pray we also should recognize our limitations and throw ourselves humbly into whom God knows Himself to be.

10. **A)** The main reason that we do not like the real nakedness is reflected when Screwtape writes referring to God’s real presence that, “the man trusts himself to the completely real, external, invisible Presence, there with him in the room and never knowable by him as he is known by it.” When we come before the Lord with this reality in our minds, we tend to shy away from this level of exposure. Just as most people would not want to expose themselves naked in public, putting our spiritual lives naked before the Lord is certainly uncomfortable. We often get more than we bargained for. Lewis, in his article “The Slip of the Tongue” comments about this specifically and the need for caution in prayer. He writes, “I say my prayers, I read a book of devotion, I prepare for, or receive, the Sacrament. But while I do these things, there is, so to speak, a voice inside me that urges caution. It tells me to be careful, to keep my head, not to go too far, not to burn my boats. I come into the presence of God with a great fear lest anything should happen to me within that presence which will prove too intolerably inconvenient when I have come out again in my ‘ordinary’ life. I don’t want to be carried away into any resolution which I shall afterwards regret. For I know that I shall be feeling quite different after breakfast; I don’t want anything to happen to me at the altar which will run up too big a bill to pay then. It would be very disagreeable, for instance, to take the duty of charity (while I am at the altar) so seriously that after breakfast I had to tear up the really stunning reply I had written to an impudent correspondent yesterday and mean to post today... Even repentance of past acts will have to be paid for. By repenting, one acknowledges them as sins—therefore not to be repeated. Better to leave that issue undecided” (**WOG**, 185-186). This is symptomatic of avoiding the nakedness of prayer. It calls us out for who we really are and demands an accounting of our attitudes and motives (Heb 4:12-13). Further, we also remember that when we are in prayer we tend to make bold claims of desiring holiness. These are dangerous because there are times when we might not really mean what we are saying. We could actually be saying things because they sound right or that we tell God what we think He wants to hear. There are other times when we know that we are going to enter this “real” presence and that we are going to be changed by it. Yet if we have a grudge against someone, we might seek revenge before we go to prayer because then we get to have our cake and eat it too by assuming that we can be forgiven. This is recognizing that authentic prayer does make us naked before Him and we know it. Lewis speaks on this theme of assuming our forgiveness in the same essay noted above when he writes, “A good author asks somewhere, ‘Have we never risen from our knees in haste for fear God’s will should become too unmistakable if we prayed longer?’ The following story was told as true. An Irish woman who had just been at confession met on the steps of the chapel the other woman who was her greatest enemy in the village. The other woman let fly a torrent of abuse. ‘Isn’t it a shame for you,’ replied Biddy, ‘to be talking to me like that, you coward, and me in a state of Grace the way I can’t answer you? But you wait, I won’t be in a state of Grace long.’ There is an excellent tragicomic example in Trollope’s *Last Chronicle*. The Archdeacon was angry with his eldest son. He at once made a number of legal arrangements to the son’s disadvantage. They could all easily have been made a few days later, but Trollope explains why the Archdeacon would not wait. To reach the next day, he had to pass through his evening prayers, and he knew he might not be able to carry his hostile plans safely through the clause, ‘forgive us our trespasses as we forgive.’ So he got his in first..... this is an extreme case of the precautions [in prayer] that I am talking about; the man will not venture within reach of the eternal until he has made the things temporal safe in advance” (**WOG**, 186-187). God forbid we ever respond to the nakedness of prayer in such ways! **B)** Answers will

vary. C) The key in these two passages is that nakedness brings shame, but the hopeful thing is that our shame will bring change in our spiritual lives through humility. When we come before the Lord, we either pretend or we are going to make ourselves vulnerable to Him in order for us to be sanctified. The foundation of authentic prayer is openness, honesty, and humility. We should be eager to appear before the Lord with this kind of nakedness, knowing that it will be for our benefit. If we come before the Lord and ask Him to change us, or reveal to us our weaknesses, we need to really mean it and be ready for when He does answer our prayer.