Fifty years ago, on November 22, 1963, the same day that President John F. Kennedy was assassinated, C.S. Lewis entered the presence of the Lord, dying in his home near Oxford, England, a week shy of age sixty-five. Lewis had gained fame for his wide array of writings including fictional works such as *The Chronicles of Narnia* and books on faith such as *The Problem of Pain*. Though popular in his day both in the United Kingdom and in the United States, Lewis expected that his name would become obscure and little known by the late twentieth century. Lewis would be surprised today to learn that his books sell in the millions annually; some have been turned into movies; and his book *Mere Christianity* was named by *Christianity Today* as the most influential Christian work of the twentieth century.

On November 22, 2013, a memorial was unveiled in the Poet’s Corner of Westminster Abbey honoring Lewis’s contribution to British literature as well as his influence within the global Christian world, an honor reserved for the likes of Shakespeare and Dickens.

While Lewis’s accomplishments are amazing and worthy of honor, the C.S. Lewis Institute (CSLI) believes that his greatest work was that of committing his life to serving Jesus Christ in a manner that encouraged others to explore the truth and joy of faith in Christ. We at CSLI are grateful for the life of this brother in Christ who has helped many live out the mission of our organization, “Founded in 1976 in the legacy of C.S. Lewis, the Institute endeavors to develop disciples who will articulate, defend, and live their faith in Christ in personal and public life.”
November 22nd marked the 50th anniversary of the passing of C.S. Lewis. No one would be more surprised than Lewis to see his body of work and his story of faith continue to impact people around the world so long after his death. Lewis is remembered in many ways, but we celebrate his life as a great example of someone who searched for truth, found it, and committed his life to follow that truth. Joel Woodruff’s article describes Lewis’s journey and points to him as a wonderful example of what it means to live as an authentic disciple of Jesus.

In the spirit of Lewis, Tom Tarrants asks the question, “What does God want from you?” Lewis found the answer, and Tom challenges each of us to seek that answer and then live our lives based on God’s call to each of us.

Lewis progressed from atheism through many phases before becoming a true follower of Christ. David Calhoun profiles John Newton and reminds us how God likewise took a wretched man and transformed him into a vessel that produced perhaps the most beloved hymn ever written.

One of the key aspects of the Institute’s discipleship approach is to encourage our Fellows to “multiply.” We’re seeing that happen in amazing places, including the desert of Djibouti in the horn of Africa. Mark Carter, an Annapolis Fellow alumnus, is leading groups of soldiers stationed at Djibouti through our Heart and Mind Discipleship program, uniting Protestants and Catholics in their pursuit of God.

As true followers of Jesus, God changes our hearts to make us more like Him. Steve and Allison King, DC alumni Fellows, describe their emotional journey as God led them to adopt two young boys from Russia and how, along the way, they were captivated by the boys’ love and learned even deeper lessons about God’s love for each of us.

As we close this calendar year, let me thank you for your support and partnership as we seek to make disciples who will make disciples. We are reaching a larger audience and are being welcomed into more and more cities. It is our prayer that every major city in America will have a C.S. Lewis Institute center by the end of this decade where thousands of disciples will be developed each year!

Sincerely,

Kerry A. Knott | K.Knott@cslewisinstitute.org

P.S. Please notice the flyer in this month’s issue highlighting our year-end fundraising campaign. Any donation will be matched by our annual matching fund!
Desert Discipleship

by Mark Carter
C.S. Lewis Institute Fellow

O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water. (Ps. 63:1)

“ You’re Going to Africa”

I received the phone call in mid-August 2012, and my head was whirling. I was being mobilized to active duty and being sent to Djibouti, in northern Africa. Even though it was a mystery to me why I hadn’t been recalled to active duty during the eleven years following 9/11, and even though I was fully prepared and committed to carry out my duty as an officer in the Navy Reserve, I was still struggling to accept the fact that I might have to leave home for nearly a year. I was a relatively senior officer with more than twenty years of service, operations in Iraq and Afghanistan were winding down, and fewer guys like me were being called up. I was newly married to my wife, Colleen, and we were hoping to start a family. Furthermore, my friend and mentor Jim Phillips, city director for C.S. Lewis Institute (CSLI) Annapolis, had asked me to help him coordinate the Year 1 Fellows for 2012–2013. In short, I couldn’t help but wonder if the “threat” of active duty was some kind of distraction or spiritual test, especially in light of my upcoming new responsibilities with CSLI Annapolis. I just knew that God had ministry plans for me at home.

As I prepared for the increasing likelihood of having to leave Colleen and put my professional life on hold for a year, I realized that if my orders were not cancelled, I would have to do some serious praying and soul searching. If God didn’t cancel my orders, wouldn’t that imply that He had something else in mind, completely different from what Colleen and I and our friends in Annapolis originally anticipated?

Arriving in the Desert

I arrived at Camp Lemonnier, Djibouti on December 20, five days before Christmas. Prior to my arrival, I’d heard that Chaplain (Commander) Brian Weigelt, formerly the Senior Protestant Chaplain at the U.S. Naval Academy Chapel and husband of CSLI Annapolis Fellow Rosslyn Weigelt, had also been deployed to Camp Lemonnier, arriving a couple of months prior. Although I hadn’t personally met Chaplain Brian, we had many common friends in Maryland. Jim Phillips connected us. Over coffee, Chaplain Brian graciously welcomed me to Camp Lemonnier, and we immediately hit it off.

Djibouti is a predominantly Muslim desert nation in the horn of Africa, at the mouth of the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. The country has no rivers; it is purported to have the hottest average recorded temperatures on the planet. I saw very few plants or other living things that I’d taken for granted in comparatively lush Maryland. Only the heartiest animals, such as camels and black African crows, thrive in the extremely harsh environment: dry, rocky, dusty, and dirty. The indigenous people of Djibouti are even tougher. In camp the natural environment is complemented by a strictly functional, military, so-called expeditionary infrastructure: nondescript, utilitarian shipping containers converted to living and working spaces. Seeing photos of the camp, Colleen noted the barrenness. Indeed,
Have you ever wondered what God wants from you?

I don’t mean wondering for a few minutes and then coming up with a quick list of do’s and don’ts like go to church, give money, read the Bible, pray, do good works, help the needy, and don’t commit any of the really bad sins like adultery or murder.

No, I mean seriously and prayerfully seeking God, and asking, “What do You want of me? How do I live the new life You have given me? How do I please and serve You?” This is one of the most important questions a believer can ask after coming to salvation. What a tragedy it would be to go through life ignorant and heedless of what God wants from you and then have to face Him at the judgment, having failed to fulfill His purposes in your life. Because of generations of inadequate preaching of the gospel and decreased personal study of Scripture, many in the church appear to be in that situation today. What about you? Have you ever personally grappled with this question in the Word of God and prayer and discovered an answer?

The answer is not a secret. It can be found repeatedly in the Bible, but the apostle Paul makes it exceptionally clear and direct: “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship” (Rom. 12:1). Ideally we do this when we first come to Christ, as Paul did. But Paul is making this appeal to believers, indicating that at least some of the believers in the church at Rome had not made this commitment. The weakness, worldliness, and compromise in the American church today is clear evidence that most believers have not done so. That’s the bad news. The good news is that some have, and everyone may and should. Those who do make the commitment experience the best of life with God. And this verse is a vital key. Throughout the centuries it has had a profound, life-changing effect on those who have understood and embraced it. As we dig into its meaning and implications, you will see why.

But first, let’s note the context. Paul wrote his letter to the church in Rome in about A.D. 55, twenty-some years after the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost in Jerusalem. Some of the converts that day were “visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes” (Acts 2:10–11). Perhaps they returned to Rome and became the firstfruits of the Roman church, or maybe it was founded through traveling merchants or evangelists. We don’t know for sure. In any case, it appears to have been in existence for some time before Paul wrote his letter. How well they understood the basics of the faith at this point is unclear. What is clear is that Paul wanted to lay the foundations they needed to be well grounded in a relationship with Christ and to live a Christ-centered life. Let’s look briefly at why Paul wrote Romans 12:1 and how it applies to us today.

For Paul this exhortation is an extremely important matter. The Greek word for “appeal” is not simply a request; it is an urgent exhortation, only one step short of a command. The heart of Paul’s concern here begins in Romans 6: he challenged all those who had come into union with Christ to faithfully live the new life they
had received. Or to put it differently, everyone who had become a *new creation* in Christ was now to live as a *new creature* in Christ. Because he knew human nature and the spiritual life very well, Paul knew that some in the Roman church had not yet given themselves fully to God; others had done so but then reasserted their own control. Knowing that the new life does not mature apart from acts of our will, he emphasized the urgency of making a decisive personal choice in this matter, either to make a wholehearted surrender to God or to reaffirm one made earlier.

Unfortunately in the past century many well-meaning believers have seen this text as something akin to the U.S. Army appealing to its regular troops for volunteers for the special forces. I say “unfortunate” because such a view gives the impression that Paul is calling believers to an optional, higher level of commitment. But this clearly is not a call to a special, higher level of commitment, service, or heroic sacrifice, as the text itself shows. Paul explicitly says that presenting our bodies as “a living sacrifice” is our “spiritual service of worship.” That is, it is the normal, rational, Spirit-led worship that every believer is bound to offer to the God who so loved us that He gave His only Son to redeem us. Although this wholehearted giving of ourselves to God will seem extreme to many in the church today, this is only because we have lived subnormally (from the gospel’s perspective) for so long that when we see the “true normal” it looks abnormal in comparison.

What does it mean to present your body as a living sacrifice to God? The imagery is drawn from the practice of animal sacrifice, where the central idea is that of a worshipper presenting an animal to God as a sacrifice to be slaughtered. Once presented, the animal no longer belonged to the worshipper but entirely and completely to God. Just as a sacrificial animal belonged wholly and irrevocably to God, Paul says true worshippers of God are to present and devote their bodies wholly and irrevocably to God as a *living* sacrifice. By this, he means not just our bodies but devoting our entire selves to God. As John Calvin observes, “By bodies, he does not mean only our skin and bones, but the totality of which we are composed . . . for the members of our bodies are the instruments by which we perform our actions.”

What does this entail? Paul made it clear earlier in Romans when he said: “Do not present your members to sin as instruments of unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments of righteousness” (Rom. 6:13). We are to present our entire selves, which includes our “members.” By “members” he meant the members of our bodies—our hands and feet, eyes, ears, lips, etc. They are the instruments through which we express ourselves in deeds of either good or evil. Thus, in concrete terms, when we present our (continued on page 20)
We sat eagerly, anxiously on the edge of chairs in an orphanage director’s office in the Siberian countryside. Finally a skinny soon-to-be-nine-year-old with a buzz cut walked in shyly, averting our eyes but then overcome with curiosity—a few quick glances of suspicion.

We looked at this little stranger and then at each other, silently communicating our puzzlement: he doesn’t look anything like the photo we received. Perhaps he had grown a bit. Or maybe we weren’t seeing straight after two overnight flights and a several-hour car ride. A photo and the names of two brothers. That’s all we had to go on. We smiled and waited a few minutes until a six-year-old joined us: cute, active, but again we noted little resemblance to the photo.

You might guess, by this point the photo didn’t really matter. For a few hours we were meeting in the flesh with the boys who would become our sons. Six months later we would return to Russia to complete the adoption process and mark a significant life transition.

We were both fairly content forty-some thing singles when we married. After the initial steep learning curve on living out the marriage covenant, we decided to add a couple of school-aged children to the household. This means that in less than three years, Allison went from being a condo-dwelling, frequently traveling professional single to a suburban homemaker and full-time mother of Russian-speaking elementary schoolers. Steve’s transition was less dramatic but not without challenges.

Now, several perspective-giving years later, we’re reflecting on what we’ve learned and how God is working in us personally.

Misplaced Love

Our relatively quick middle-aged transition into marriage and parenthood was an especially effective magnifier of indwelling sin that was easier to mask or ignore when we were single. Although various previous experiences had graciously aided in exposing our selfishness, we now saw it from new perspectives. Having both completed two years of the C.S. Lewis Institute Fellows Program shortly before our marriage, we’d read extensively about the sin that so easily entangles. Now the reality was hitting harder.

For me (Steve), marriage revealed my bent toward self-centeredness—my failing to notice and be sensitive to my wife’s needs and desires; resisting impingements on my schedule; avoiding involvement with other people’s issues except when convenient; hesitating to involve others in my decision-making processes; fighting bitterness for having to limit or give up some of the good things I was involved in. I had long considered Philippians 2:3–6 to be one of my favorite passages:

In humility consider others better than yourselves . . . Look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:
Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing . . .

Would this still prove to be a favorite when tested more intensely, by marriage and then by children? Serving our family full time, Allison became aware of her reliance on the ego strokes gained in the workplace and her professional status had become a critical source of her significance. Moving from a “competent” employee to an “incompetent” mom revealed new emotional weaknesses and fears. Second Corinthians 12:9 took on a deeper, more personal meaning: “But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.”

For both of us, uncharacteristic anger and impatience were triggered by the boys’ typically childish behavior. What had happened to the 1 Corinthians 13 love that is not easily angered and keeps no record of wrongs?

At root, the changes in our circumstances helped us see more clearly where our affections really lay, how much we loved ourselves—our positions, our comfort, how others responded to us, our perception of what others thought of us—to the detriment of loving God and others.

As we encountered more hour-by-hour opportunities to put others’ interests in front of our own, we saw more occasions to be discouraged by our repeated failures as well as more incentive to call out to God for help and trust His nudges toward self-forgetting love.

Knowing, Doing, Loving

Both of us, somewhat introverted, naturally gravitated toward relatively routine, ordered lives that kept the untidiness of relationships at a comfortable distance. Of course, in our marriage this pattern became impossible when dealing with each other and even less possible after being graced with two sons, one of whom is temperamentally our polar opposite in his ability to engage others in the moment. These past few years have definitely brought increasing opportunities to experience the enmeshed relationship of knowing, doing, and loving.

We think back to our first trip to Russia with the names of two boys and a photo. While we’ve heard about adoptive parents who fell in love with their soon-to-be kids after seeing a photo, we can’t say that happened to us. (And a good (continued on page 25)
As a parish priest serving at Olney, England, John Newton made a practice of writing hymns to accompany his sermons. The Scripture text for the New Year’s service on January 1, 1773, was 1 Chronicles 17:16–17, a prayer of King David’s in which he asks, “Who am I, O LORD God, and what is mine house, that thou hast brought me hitherto?” As Newton reflected on these words, he thought of how God’s grace had found him in his sin and brought him to a place of honor as a minister of the gospel. Over the next few days, he wrote the hymn we call “Amazing Grace.” He gave it the title “Faith’s Review and Expectation.” In the first three verses, Newton reviews God’s grace in his life thus far; in the next three, he states his certainty that God’s grace will lead him on and at last to heaven.

Newton’s Life

Amazing grace! (how sweet the sound)
that saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found, was blind,
but now I see.

John Newton’s father was a seaman. His mother was a godly woman who taught him the Shorter Catechism and the hymns of Isaac Watts. She died when John was six years old, and the little boy resolved to honor his mother’s memory by growing up to be a preacher. On his eleventh birthday (1736), after two miserable years at a boarding school, John went to sea with his father. His unsettled behavior and lack of discipline created many problems for himself, his father, and his shipmates.

During a time at home, he was “impressed” into the Royal Navy. Overstaying a leave, he was arrested as a deserter and publicly flogged. Later he was transferred to a merchant ship bound for Africa. In Sierra Leone Newton worked for a merchant whose African wife brutally mistreated him whenever she could. He had become, as he later described himself, “a servant of slaves in Africa.” He escaped his miserable life by joining the crew of a slave ship. He now felt that he could do as he pleased. He was given to such profanity that the captain, who himself was “not at all circumspect in his expressions,” seriously reproved him. The “cargo” of the slave ship included African women and girls, naked and available to any of the crew. Newton never said that he used the slave girls, but he later described his moral condition in the words of 2 Peter 2:14—“Having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin.” Newton later wrote, “The troubles and miseries . . . were my own. I brought them upon myself, by forsaking [God’s] good and pleasant paths and choosing the way of transgressors which I found very hard; they led to slavery, contempt, famine and despair.”

’Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
and grace my fears reliev’d;
How precious did that grace appear,
the hour I first believed!

Newton was tempted to throw himself into the sea to drown, but, he later wrote,
“The secret hand of God restrained me.”

The memory of his godly mother and also his love for Mary Catlett, whom he had met in 1743, when she was fourteen and he was seventeen, gave him reason to live.

John Newton decided to stay on the Guinea coast and seek his fortune as an agent in the slave trade. His life seemed to be going well, he enjoyed his work, and pleasure was easy to come by. He was “governed by present appearances, and looked no further,” he wrote, but he came to see that “He who is eyes to the blind” was leading him in uncharted paths.

Leaving Africa in 1748 on the Greyhound, a slave ship bound for the American colonies, Newton found a copy of Thomas à Kempis’s The Imitation of Christ and, to pass the time, began to read it with indifference. Suddenly he was startled to be asking, “What if these things should be true?”

About this time a brutal gale struck the ship. Newton cried out, “The Lord have mercy on us.” Though he’d said it flippantly, he was “instantly struck” with his own words. “What mercy can there be for me? The ship’s chief blasphemer, the loudest swearer, the man who mocked the Lord’s existence. What mercy can there be for me?” Miraculously the ship survived. Was this the hour John Newton first believed? As long as he lived, he remembered March 21 as the anniversary of his conversion. “He who takes notice of the cries of the young ravens in their nests,” Newton wrote, “was pleased to hear mine.” He began to read the New Testament, but “how faint and wavering were my first returns to Thee.”

When the battered Greyhound finally reached the coast of Ireland, John Newton went to church, received Communion, and “engaged to be the Lord’s forever, and only His.” But Newton had much to learn as a Christian. During his next voyage, he found himself unable to live up to his spiritual goals. Falling into a time of despair, he became gravely ill. Even so, he was enabled to cast himself upon God’s mercy, a turning point as decisive as the storm of the previous spring. He thought, “What a poor creature I am in myself, incapable of standing a single hour without continual fresh supplies of strength and grace from the fountain-head.”

Newton’s life is a story of many dangers—a runaway horse when he was a boy, illness in Africa, storms at sea, slave revolts onboard ship, a hunting accident in Ireland. There were many toils. Newton did rough work as a seaman with his father, as a midshipman in the navy, and as “a servant of slaves in Africa.” And there were many snares. Early on he espoused a deism that freed him from the moral constraints his mother’s faith had fastened on him. Deism led to atheism. Newton wrote later, “I believed my own lie.” But God’s grace kept Newton safe and brought him safely home to England.

The Lord has promis’d good to me,
His Word my hope secures;
He will my shield and portion be,
as long as life endures. (continued on page 27)
Unlike the dramatic, instantaneous conversion of the apostle Paul on the road to Damascus, C.S. Lewis came to faith in Christ through a search for truth that journeyed through the twists, turns, and dead ends of a long, thirty-year maze characterized by varying worldviews, ideas, and religions. This quest involved both his intellect, which sought logical, sound answers to the questions of life, and his heart, which longed for something to fill the lonely void within. As Lewis explored each worldview along the way, he would be enamored by the approach, only to eventually recognize the weaknesses of the view and be disappointed by the conclusions of that particular ideology. It was this thoughtful, careful, Socratic-like search for life’s raison d’être that enabled Lewis to understand so deeply the world’s religions and philosophies and also articulate how these views paled in comparison to the ultimate truth found in Jesus Christ. In other words, God took Lewis’s pre-Christian wanderings in false religions and philosophy and redeemed those experiences, enabling Lewis to communicate the truths of biblical faith in ways that searching people could understand. After all, he had been there himself.

In the preface (sometimes presented as an afterword) to the third edition of The Pilgrim’s Regress, an allegorical look at his own conversion, Lewis writes,

The sole merit I claim for this book is that it is written by one who has proved them [various worldviews] all to be wrong. There is no room for vanity in the claim: I know them to be wrong not by intelligence but by experiences, such experience as would not have come my way if my youth had been wiser, more virtuous, and less self-centred than it was. For I have myself been deluded by every one of these false answers in turn and have contemplated each of them earnestly enough to discover the cheat. To have embraced so many false Florimels is no matter for boasting; it is fools, they say, who learn by experience. But since they do at last learn, let a fool bring his experience into the common stock that wiser men profit by it.  

Lewis had in a sense “dated” and been infatuated by a number of “Florimels,” damsels of great beauty who turned out to be illusions. By “dating” various worldviews, over time, Lewis developed deep insight into the ways in which a religion can at first appear attractive, only to lead to bitter disappointment when the honeymoon is over and the witch suddenly appears. It was this experience in the first thirty years of his life, before his conversion, that prepared him to become one of the greatest Christian apologists of the twentieth century.

Raised in a Christian Home

Lewis’s spiritual journey began within the confines of a home in which he experienced the love and security communicated to him by his mother, Flora, the daughter of an Anglican priest. Born in 1898, his early years afforded him great happiness. His
mother read stories from the Bible, prayed with Lewis daily, and introduced him to the teachings of Christ. The family attended a Protestant church in Belfast, although they didn’t have any problem in hiring a Catholic maid, whom Lewis loved and who also told him Bible stories.

Lewis’s idyllic childhood, however, would come crashing down when his mom was diagnosed with cancer. Lewis, aged nine at the time, prayed fervently that God would heal his mom. When he was greeted with the tragic news of her death, he became angry at a God who would take away his loving mother. Added to the pain of this loss was the inability of his father, Albert, to comfort and console Lewis and his brother, Warnie. When the boys most needed their dad, just weeks after their mother’s death Albert sent them off to a small English boarding school to fend for themselves.

Lewis had begun his life surrounded by Christian practice and thought, but the loss of his mom and the coldness of his father sent him reeling spiritually. From this point he describes his spiritual journey in this way: “On the intellectual side my own progress had been from ‘popular realism’ to Philosophical Idealism; from Idealism to Pantheism; from Pantheism to Theism; and from Theism to Christianity. I still think this a very natural road, but I now know that it is a road very rarely trodden.”

**Pessimism, Atheism, and Popular Realism**

In boarding school Lewis’s antagonism toward Christian faith grew as he experienced the hypocrisy of the “Christian” boarding school. The cruel hazing of the younger boys by the older boys burnt an indelible impression on Lewis, as he later wrote of the pain inflicted by those in the “inner circle.” Lewis’s first headmaster frequently beat his students and was actually declared mentally unstable soon after Lewis’s departure. Fortunately Lewis had the companionship of his brother, Warnie, for some of these difficult years during which Lewis became a pessimistic atheist.

When it was clear that Lewis was suffering miserably, his father relented and arranged for him to be tutored in the home of William Kirkpatrick, who had taught Albert himself and also Warnie. A former headmaster, Kirkpatrick was skilled in the Socratic method and logic. From the moment Lewis met Kirkpatrick, whom he called “The Great Knock,” Lewis was pressed to give a logical reason for every statement he made and defend his position. Some would have found Kirkpatrick intimidating, but Lewis for the first time ever enjoyed school. Later Lewis would state that the intellectual rigor and challenge of Kirkpatrick was like “red beef and strong beer,” an exhilarating diet that gave the bright Lewis confidence and enjoyment. From the age of fifteen to seventeen, under the Kirkpatrick’s influence, Lewis sharpened the debate and reasoning skills that would serve him well for the rest of his life. Rationalism, or popular
realism as Lewis would call it, became his modus operandi as he sought to believe only that which could be proven by clear logic and reason. He adopted a materialistic or naturalistic worldview in which the only thing that mattered was “matter.” His atheist worldview was solidifying.

It is interesting to note that down the road these very Socratic reasoning tools would point Lewis in the direction of Christianity and enable him to explain the reasonableness of the Christian faith to the modern, scientifically oriented world.

Following his years with Kirkpatrick, Lewis gained entrance to Oxford University. His first studies at Oxford, however, would be short-lived, as he soon found himself in the British Army, serving as an officer in the trenches of World War I. As he witnessed firsthand the horrors of war in France and was eventually wounded in action, men dying all around him, Lewis’s atheism became more entrenched.

Lewis would survive the war, return to his studies in Oxford, and immerse himself in the academic world.

Philosophical Idealism

Lewis was an outstanding student who attained a triple first at Oxford in classics, philosophy, and English. A triple first means that Lewis was at the top of his class in each of these subjects. His photographic memory, ability to write well, and gifting as a logician shot him to the head of the class.

During his student days, as many in his generation were recovering from the horrors of war and were questioning the meaning of life, Lewis himself began to sense that his atheism just didn’t address his inner longings for something more. And so for a time he felt drawn to what he called philosophical idealism, as espoused by the British Hegelians and Henri Bergson. This worldview argued that the world we perceive through our senses is only appearance or curtain behind which the Absolute is hiding. In other words, Lewis was beginning to realize that there is more to this world than just “matter” and the material world we live in.

Pantheism

The phase of philosophical idealism didn’t last long, as Lewis’s commitment to logic soon found the British Hegelian “Absolute” to be too vague and ambiguous. Now Lewis explored pantheistic religions such as Hinduism and the monistic world of Buddhism. He was intrigued by the idea that the “Absolute” rather than being vague was somehow immanent, within and around everything. Perhaps everything really was spiritual and matter was an illusion. This worldview seemed to touch his imagination and was more intellectually challenging. However, again, his logic forced him to realize that pantheism was unable to explain the physical and spiritual worlds in a way that seemed to bear any resemblance to reality. To totally abandon the obvious, the physical world, and claim that it is just an illusion went too far. What’s more, within pantheism there seemed to be no way to link goodness and truth. He would later write in his book *Miracles*, “The Pantheist’s God does nothing, demands nothing. He is there if you wish for Him, like a book on a shelf. He will not pursue you.”

Lewis knew both through logic and from exploring his heart within, that there must
be another way to explain the world as we see it.

Theism

Lewis eventually became a tutor and lecturer at Magdalen College, Oxford. He really enjoyed the lively discussions on philosophy, literature, and religion that took place among his colleagues, and Lewis developed some good friendships. Lewis soon realized that most of the people he gravitated to were Christians, such as J.R.R. Tolkien, Hugo Dyson, and Owen Barfield. They encouraged Lewis to consider the claims of Christianity.

While Lewis on the one hand was approaching this quest from an intellectual perspective, he also began to sense that there was more to the human person than just the mind. In his later book The Screwtape Letters, Lewis writes, “Think of your man as a series of concentric circles, his will being the innermost, his intellect coming next, and finally his fantasy.” Another word for “fantasy” would be “imagination.” Lewis noted that throughout his life he was moved by particular writers as they painted a picture that enlivened his imagination and gave him a sense of joy or longing that was beyond his present experience of reality. In other words, there were things that his intellect or mind couldn’t fully grasp that he knew were still important.

He tells, for example, of the time early in his life when he picked up a book titled Phantastes, by the nineteenth-century Scottish writer George MacDonald, which somehow baptized Lewis’s imagination. A whole new world was opened up to him. And wouldn’t you know, MacDonald had been a Christian. Over time Lewis realized that he liked other Christian writers as well, such as Dante, Milton, George Herbert, and G.K. Chesterton.

Alister McGrath writes, “Lewis’s reading of the classics of English literature forced him to encounter and evaluate the ideas and attitudes that they embodied and expressed. And to his chagrin, Lewis began to realize that those who were grounded on a Christian outlook seemed to offer the most resilient and persuasive ‘treaty with reality.’”

Lewis knew that truth would somehow reconcile the rational, intellectual external side of his life with the deep yearning that he felt from the internal imaginative side of his being. Finally, after years of thinking, reading, arguing, debating, reflecting, engaging in discussions with friends, and reading literature, Lewis gave in to the intellectual idea that God exists. He writes, “In the Trinity Term of 1929 I gave in, and admitted that God was God, and knelt and prayed: perhaps, that night, the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England.” At this point, Lewis had converted to theism, the idea that God created humankind and the world in which we live. A Creator God best explains the reality that we perceive with our senses and the inner
C.S. Lewis the Truth-Seeker

longings that we have for something greater than ourselves. But Lewis still had not converted to Christ. He had fallen into the camp of the monotheistic worldview held by Jews, Christians, and Muslims and was simply a theist.

Christianity

Up to now, Lewis had systematically “dated” the worldviews of atheism, a number of different philosophies, the pantheistic world of Hinduism and Buddhism, agnosticism, and had conceded that monotheism made the most sense of the world. He knew that God existed. Now he would need to explore Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. He looked closely at one question separating these three monotheistic faiths: did Jesus exist, and if so, was He who He said He was, and did He really arise from the dead?

On September 19, 1931, Lewis went for a walk with his friends Hugo Dyson and J.R.R. Tolkien behind Magdalen College on a favorite trail called Addison’s Walk. That night they discussed the literary idea of myth. Myth as they defined it was a story that passed on some element of truth and touched the imagination. Tolkien argued that the difference between all other myths and the Christian myth was that the Christian story really happened in history through the incarnation of Jesus Christ. In other words, Jesus was who He said He was, and He really arose from the dead. He encouraged Lewis to approach the New Testament story with the same passion he exhibited when approaching other literary works.

A short time after that conversation, Lewis was riding in his brother’s motorcycle sidecar on the way to the zoo. At the end of the ride, he suddenly realized he was a Christian. In a letter dated October 1, 1931, to his childhood friend Arthur Greeves, Lewis wrote: “I have just passed on from believing in God to definitely believing in Christ—in Christianity . . . [My] long night talk with Dyson and Tolkien had a good deal to do with it.”

Lewis’s imagination had been intrigued by the story of the Gospels; his intellect had conceded that the idea of God made the most sense out of reality, and now he had finally submitted the innermost concentric circle, his will, to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. His long quest to discover truth had finally found the Way, the Truth, and the Life, Jesus of Nazareth.

With full abandon and commitment to Jesus, Lewis now sought to submit all aspects of his life to God and live to the full as a disciple of Christ. During the next thirty years or so, he would publish nearly a book a year, using the genres of fantasy, fiction, apologetics, letters, and other writings to share the good news of the gospel with the world around him. He would become the second best known voice on the BBC during World War II after Winston Churchill, giving people a reason to believe in and live out the truths of faith in Jesus. Today his books continue to sell millions of copies every year.

Why is this? I would argue that God redeemed the many years of searching by Lewis. God turned the dead ends, the twists and turns of Lewis’s search for truth into a wealth of experience and wisdom by which Lewis could effectively point out the weaknesses of all other worldviews and shine the light on the truth of Jesus.
past and turning them into a blessing for ourselves and others.

Lewis went on to emulate the example of Paul in Athens. Luke writes about Paul,

The longer Paul waited in Athens for Silas and Timothy, the angrier he got—all those idols! The city was a junkyard of idols.

He discussed it with the Jews and other likeminded people at their meeting place. And every day he went out on the streets and talked with anyone who happened along. He got to know some of the Epicurean and Stoic intellectuals pretty well through these conversations. Some of them dismissed him with sarcasm: “What an airhead!” But others, listening to him go on about Jesus and the resurrection, were intrigued: “That’s a new slant on the gods. Tell us more.”

(Acts 17:16–18 THE MESSAGE)

Lewis was called names akin to “airhead,” as some in the Oxford intellectual community couldn’t fathom how such a bright intellectual could fall for Christianity. He was denied promotions and suffered personal insult for his beliefs. However, Lewis’s conviction, formed after years of intellectual, imaginative, and willful searching had found the truth. There was no turning back. He has helped countless people get a new slant on the gods and discover the one true God. God redeemed Lewis’s past search for truth by using this bright Oxford professor to show modern generations that God is not only reasonable; He can also fulfill the deepest longings within the human heart.

Notes

2. Ibid., 5.

RECOMMENDED READING

‘A Life: Eccentric Genius, Reluctant Prophet’ by Alister McGrath
Alister McGrath has given us an engaging and thorough biography of C.S. Lewis in his C.S. Lewis — A Life.
beauty seemed to be scarce in the harsh desert environment.

After a few weeks, I concluded that the overall spiritual landscape in camp paralleled the desert landscape. There seemed to be an ongoing struggle with discipline among the troops. There was great disparity between the large camp population and the modest weekly attendance at worship services. Despite the challenges, the chapel community was vibrant and enriching. Furthermore, Chaplain Brian and Father (Lieutenant Commander) Mark Reilly, the camp’s only Roman Catholic chaplain, worked well as a team, planning joint Catholic-Protestant events whenever possible.

"That They May All Be One"

Combined Joint Task Force Horn of Africa (CJTF HOA) is a joint command, meaning that members of all branches of military service (army, navy, air force, marines) work together. That kind of working environment requires each service member to deprioritize his or her own service-unique culture and way of doing things in favor of doing business the joint way. Whether we liked it or not, all of us had to give up part of our professional identities, which can be challenging as well as humbling.

In a sermon on Jesus’ prayer for unity in John 17, Chaplain Brian drew a similar comparison to the body of Christ in camp. He noted that there on base all of us worshipped in a way that was different from what we were used to back home. With only one Camp Chapel and three Protestant services on Sunday, the options were not nearly as diverse as they might be state-side. The 2012 Christmas Eve Protestant worship service was a perfect example. Contemporary and traditional praise music, praise dance, and Holy Communion were all incorporated into a memorable celebration of Jesus’ birth. For all of us there to worship together in unity in that particular way and at that point in our lives, God had to gather us from across the United States and around the world, remove us from our homes and comfort zones, and set us together in the desert.

During the Exodus, didn’t God remove the distractions of Egypt and place His chosen people in the desert to teach them how to trust Him completely? Didn’t St. Anthony and other Desert Fathers and Mothers flee to the desert to minimize distractions that would hinder their relationships with God? Similarly, isn’t C.S. Lewis best known for being a proponent of Mere Christianity, where traditional and denominational differences are put into proper perspective for the sake of core unity in the fundamentals of the Christian faith? Could it be that God placed me and other disciples of Jesus at Camp Lemonnier in the desert in order to remove distractions and draw us closer to Himself and to each other, even across traditional and denominational lines?

Heart & Mind Discipleship

In the first weeks of 2013, I spent many off-duty hours more focused on devotional
and quiet time with the Lord. I also participated in a chapel-sponsored Experiencing God (Henry Blackaby) study group led by Kentucky National Guard Chaplain Mark East. Throughout the winter study, I prayed for the Holy Spirit to show me how I could serve the Lord’s kingdom in camp; toward the end of the study, I reread Jesus’ Great Commission:

*And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matt. 28:18–20)*

That is when it hit me. To describe it in navy terms, the Great Commission is what is referred to as a *standing order.* In other words, as followers of Jesus, each and every one of us is commanded to make disciples, to baptize them, and to teach them all that Jesus commanded in Holy Scripture. We don’t need to ask God’s permission to make disciples, because He has already commanded us plainly to do so.

CSLI’s Heart & Mind Discipleship curriculum immediately came to mind. Our friends and CSLI Annapolis Fellows David and Betsy McPeak had approached Colleen and me in late August 2012 and asked if we would consider helping them facilitate a Heart & Mind Discipleship group at Bay Area Community Church, Crofton, Maryland. Despite the preparations for my deployment, the timing seemed perfect. So Colleen and I joined David and Betsy, and the Lord greatly blessed us and the Heart & Mind group.

With clarity and renewed focus, I asked Chaplain Brian if we could meet for coffee. Before I could directly ask if he could partner with me in facilitating the Heart & Mind Discipleship group, he offered his full support. Someone had just asked him for this very type of discipleship opportunity. Chaplain Brian recommended starting Heart & Mind Discipleship after Easter. We were on our way!

**March in the Desert**

Every year during Lent, Bishop Giorgio Bertin, Catholic bishop of Djibouti, leads many of his parishioners in a day-long March in the Desert, followed by Holy Communion. Thanks to the fruitful relationships that Father Mark and Chaplain Brian had nurtured with Bishop Bertin and other local religious leaders, Camp Lemonnier Catholics and Protestants were invited to participate in the spiritual retreat. March 8, 2013: the desert walk deserves much more description than what I can provide here. But there in the desert quietness I felt like the Lord telling me to share Heart & Mind Discipleship with the Camp Lemonnier Roman Catholic community. Consulting with Chaplain Brian, we made the Heart & Mind materials available to Father Mark, who re-
viewed the materials and wanted to advertise it to the Roman Catholic congregation.

When I sought out Father Mark to give him his own copy of the Heart & Mind Study Guide, he told me that he had once used C.S. Lewis’s *Mere Christianity* as a primary text for a class on Christianity and World Religions for high school seniors. I assured him that the C.S. Lewis Institute strives to be ecumenical in its programs and practice. With a smile he said, “If the C.S. Lewis Institute is true to its namesake, I would expect it to be.”

**Mere Christian—Mere Disciple**

The Heart & Mind Discipleship Group—Protestant and Catholic service men and women from all branches of the military and civilians—gathered in the chapel meeting room and averaged ten to fifteen participants on any given Monday night. Both Chaplain Brian and Father Mark attended faithfully, and the Holy Spirit blessed our group tremendously! As with any small group, our dynamic was unique. Like me, most of the participants had not planned or even desired to come to Djibouti. Yet we strove together to draw closer to the Lord in our shared desert experience. Although each Heart & Mind lesson is a gem in its own right, the standout topic for our group seemed to be, fittingly, humility.

So what lessons learned, if you’ll pardon my military jargon again, might be worth passing along?

- **Embrace the desert experience.** We probably shouldn’t be surprised if our Father dramatically alters our best, well-made plans, and we suddenly find ourselves in the desert, metaphorically speaking if not also literally. We should strive prayerfully to accept desert seasons as opportunities to be humble before our Lord and before others. Will we lament our desert experiences as did the disgruntled Israelites during the Exodus and cry for a return to the delicacies of Egypt? Or will we trust our Lord and draw nearer to Him in the desert seasons of life?

- **Practice Christian ecumenism.** We can no longer afford to be blasé about unity in Christ! A place of unity is also a place of loving humility for every one of us. I am by no means advocating abandoning core doctrinal truth for the sake of a “phony unity.” Nor am I in favor of abandoning treasured worship practices. I am encouraging standing shoulder to shoulder with our sisters and brothers in Christ across traditional and denominational lines and together being God’s agents for His kingdom in the world. Defending the sanctity of life, feeding the hungry, and easing the suffering of the sick are just three endeavors where all disciples of Christ can join together.

- **Make disciples!** The Great Commission is our King’s standing order. For those of us who have been blessed with the Fellows, Journey, or Heart & Mind Discipleship Programs through CSLI, are we partnering with other disciple makers and using those blessings/gifts to bless others? Are we joining in actively making disciples in our local churches, homes, small groups, and wherever God places us in the world?
Or are we sitting all alone on the sidelines, content with our own personal spiritual-growth programs? The desert can certainly be a very challenging place, but with a clearer focus on God and a realization of His abiding presence with us, we can experience a renewed sweetness of His grace, both individually and with fellow disciples of Christ. Desert experiences can facilitate our concentrating on the basics—drawing closer to our Lord and drawing closer to our sisters and brothers in Christ across traditional and denominational lines. C.S. Lewis famously advocated a position of Mere Christianity—essential, core, shared beliefs for all believers for all time. Perhaps that is also the place where we can focus our discipleship efforts—Mere Discipleship, if you will. The C.S. Lewis Institute is just one tremendous resource available to us. Will we obey our King’s standing order to go and make disciples—Mere Disciples?

Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. (Isa. 43:18–19)

Notes
1. All Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version.

Ever since I became a Christian I have thought that the best, perhaps the only, service I could do for my unbelieving neighbors was to explain and defend the belief that has been common to nearly all Christians at all times.

C.S. Lewis

RECOMMENDED READING
On April 10th, 2003, the 1st Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment, faced with the task of seizing the presidential palace in downtown Baghdad, ran headlong into what Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North called, “the worst day of fighting for U.S. Marines.” Hiding in buildings and mosques, wearing civilian clothes, and spread out for over a mile, Saddam Hussein’s militants rained down bullets and rocket propelled grenades on the 1st Battalion. But when the smoke of the eight-hour battle cleared, only one Marine had lost his life. Some said the 1st Battalion was incredibly lucky. But in the hearts and minds of the Marines who were there, there was no question. God had brought them miraculously through that battle.
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(continued from page 5)

bodies to God as living sacrifices, we cease to use our members for sin and begin to use them for godliness. We choose to no longer look with our eyes at lustful images but rather at things that are wholesome; to no longer listen with our ears to dirty jokes, evil speaking, etc., but rather to things that are edifying; to no longer use our tongues to criticize, tell lies, gossip or slander but rather to speak wise, truthful words that bless people and to share the gospel; to no longer use our private parts to have illicit sex but to be chaste; to use our hands to work and to serve; to no longer sit around in selfish ease but rise to our feet and get up and out in service to God and neighbor (Rom. 6:17).

A specific example of this is found in 1 Corinthians 6:18–20, where a member of the church was involved in sexual sin: Paul said: “Flee from sexual immorality . . . Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.” Or as Paul said elsewhere, “Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31).

Surrendering ourselves fully to God is an essential key to how we “glorify God and enjoy Him forever,” to quote the Westminster shorter catechism. It isn’t in some act of heroism or great sacrifice; those are few and far between. Rather, it is in choosing each day to use the members of our bodies as befits children of God, new creatures in Christ, members of the kingdom of God. And this is possible through the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Why do so few people in the church fully surrender to God?

Why do so few people in the church seem to live this way? Some in the church are not truly saved, do not love God, and therefore have no interest in submitting to Him. But that is only one part of the problem. Others are saved but have not been taught that they are called to full surrender to God. Still others do know but are fearful of what it might cost; they avoid even thinking about it. Finally, there are those who have heard and accepted the call to full surrender but for some reason have relapsed, gotten off track, and taken back the control of their lives. As D.L. Moody observed, “The problem with a living sacrifice is that it keeps crawling off the altar.”

How people react to this call depends on where their hearts are. The idea of a total, absolute, and irrevocable surrender of our whole selves to God will come as a shock to those who have never heard or read about it. Others, who want to exempt certain areas of their life from God’s control, will see it as an unwelcome and unreasonable intrusion upon their freedom. Still others will see it as an impossible ideal not meant to be taken literally; “after all,” they reason, “God made us and knows how weak we are.” But those who truly know God will hear His voice through Paul’s words and will not refuse Him or rationalize away His call. They will desire to be entirely His, even as they recognize their own weakness and inability to live up to His call perfectly.

You may be wondering if such a surrender is really necessary. Yes, it is. Why? Before entering God’s kingdom, we were rebels against God and pursued a life of autonomy, which was manifested in the various sins that characterized our life. To repent of our sins and trust Christ is in
effect to end our rebellion, lay down our arms, and come under God’s reign. C.S. Lewis put it well,

Fallen man is not simply an imperfect creature who needs improvement: he is a rebel who must lay down his arms. Laying down your arms, surrendering, saying you are sorry, realising that you have been on the wrong track and getting ready to start life over again from the ground floor—that is the only way out of our ‘hole.’ This process of surrender—this movement full speed astern—is what Christians call repentance.³

To reserve the right to run certain areas of our lives as we see fit is really to carry our old attitude of rebellion into our new lives, thereby rejecting one of the most basic principles of kingdom life. Surrender is the concrete, ongoing expression of repentant faith and union with Christ; it is the fruit of a converted heart and the basic attitude and posture of a child of God toward his or her heavenly Father. Surrender and obedience are critical!

How is such a life possible? Through an event, followed by a process. The Greek text here clearly means we must make a definite, decisive, absolute surrender to God (Rom. 12:1). The Amplified Bible captures it well: “make a decisive dedication of your bodies—presenting all your members and faculties—as a living sacrifice, holy (devoted, consecrated) and well pleasing to God.” This is the event, it is something we do at a specific point in time. It is an act of the will, not a feeling or sentiment. It is a settled determination to give ourselves wholly to God; to be His, and His alone, and to do His will, no matter the cost, for the rest of our lives. We are henceforth His and no longer our own. He doesn’t want a truce or armistice; He wants unconditional surrender.

Ideally we do this at the time of conversion, like Paul, though ignorance or resistance can cause a delay. In any case, the flesh will resist this, and the devil will use every trick in the book to prevent it. He will whisper in your ear phrases such as Are you crazy? You will become a religious fanatic. You will lose your reputation. You could lose your job and career. Your friends will abandon you. You could lose your marriage. This could cost you your life. And these are only a few. He will bring before your mind the things you fear most and tell you that God will require them of you if you surrender to Him. God will send you to Africa as a missionary. He will call you to marry an unattractive spouse. Or to live in an unfulfilling or unhappy marriage. Or to live in poverty. And on it goes.

What the devil will not tell you is the truth: that you are surrendering into the arms of love, the arms of a loving Father in heaven who redeemed you at great cost, who knows what is best for your life, and who only wants to do you good. You are surrendering to God’s all-wise purposes for your life, which will bring you ultimate satisfaction and fulfillment in life and the greatest glory to God.
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Making this surrender, doesn’t mean that we promise henceforth live a perfect life. Nor does it mean that we will not sometimes stumble into sin or grow weak in our commitment or even relapse to self-management. Rather, it means that we make a fundamental commitment to take God’s side in a lifelong, relentless warfare against our sins in the pursuit of holiness. It means that in our hearts we “will to do His will” and desire to be transformed into Christ-likeness. It means that we give as much of ourselves as we are aware of at the time to God, and let him expand that awareness as life unfolds. It means that in our weakness, we depend on His strength and daily seek to be filled afresh with His Spirit and obey His word. And it means that when we stumble and sin, we turn at once to our Father in confession and repentance to receive His loving pardon. Like a ragged little street urchin who has been adopted by a childless king, we know from whence we have come and what a mess we still are. We also know that He wants to clean up our mess, and we want to cooperate and do whatever it takes to please Him and become like Jesus.

When we grasp God’s great love for us personally, seen in the mercies of God, especially in the cross of Christ, it changes something within us.

God’s Goal for Us

The event of surrender is followed by the process of transformation, and this brings us to the heart of Paul’s concern in these verses. Surrender is not an end in itself but is the means to a much greater end. For God’s ultimate goal is not simply the forgiveness of our sins or even the improvement of our moral life; it is the transformation of our lives into the very image of Christ. Phrased differently, it is the restoration of God’s image in us, which was disfigured at the Fall.

The word Paul uses for transform is the same word translated “transfigure” in the Gospels to describe the change that Jesus experienced on the mount (Luke 9:28–36). The process begins on earth and ends in heaven, but we are called to make as much progress as we can while still alive.

Transformation into Christ’s image is not an easy matter, nor is it quick. Paul knew that all people have been shaped and powerfully influenced by the values, attitudes, desires, and behaviors of the fallen world—that every human being is in a process of “spiritual formation.” The only question is which spirit is doing the forming: the spirit of the world or the Spirit of God? He also knew that coming to faith in Jesus, though it changes the human heart in a fundamental way, doesn’t produce instant perfection. Because the pressures to conform to the world’s ways is very powerful, Paul exhorts the Romans to do two things. First, “Do not be conformed to this world,” (Rom. 12:2), or as the Phillips paraphrase puts it, “Don’t let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold.” The idea is to stop allowing yourself to be formed and shaped by the spirit and behaviors of the fallen world. This means that we identify and forsake worldly ways of thinking and behaving. Second, Paul says, “Be transformed by the renewal of your mind,” that is, “Let God remold your minds from within” (PHILLIPS). The passive voice here reminds us that it is ultimately God who changes us; we cannot do it in our unaided strength. As Paul said earlier, it is by the Spirit that we put to death the works of the body (Rom. 8:13).

Type A’s and perfectionists must be careful here that they don’t get discouraged and give up because they can’t achieve 100% in this life. Like everyone, they must aim high and be earnest while realizing that perfection doesn’t come until we reach heaven.
But meaningful progress here is possible and vitally important for God’s glory, for us personally and for our rewards in the world to come. The Holy Spirit brings this transformation chiefly through the Word He inspired—the Bible. The more we learn of the Word under the Spirit’s teaching, the more we will see God’s truth, understand His will, learn His ways, and thereby recognize and forsake remaining sin in our lives. Active fellowship and regular attendance in a church that preaches and teaches the Bible as the Word of God is essential.

Romans 12:2 reinforces the fact that total surrender to God is just the beginning of a lifelong process of putting off the world’s ways, putting to death the deeds of the body, and being transformed into the likeness of Christ through the power of the Spirit. It also helps explain why some believers who have been truly converted but are not fully committed experience so much defeat and so little change. They have their feet in two worlds. They are trying to have it both ways. They have too much of the world in them to enjoy God and too much of God to enjoy the world.

Is that you, or someone you know? Whether from ignorance, misguided teaching, fear of trusting God, or rebelliousness, the way we break out of this bondage into the abundant life with Christ is to present ourselves to God as a living sacrifice and let Him lead us from there.

**Our Motivation for Surrender to God**

What on earth could motivate someone to make such a surrender? Paul gives us the answer when he says, “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God.” The mercies of God are the loving kindness and compassion of God that Paul has been describing in the preceding eleven chapters: God’s mercies in sending His Son to die for our sins, in drawing us to Himself, in forgiving our sins, in giving us eternal life, in giving us His Spirit. And this really takes us to the heart of the matter. True Christianity, as William Barclay once said, “does not think of a man as finally submitting to the power of God; it thinks of him as finally surrendering to the love of God. It is not that man’s will is crushed, but that man’s heart is broken.” When we grasp God’s great love for us personally, seen in the mercies of God, especially in the cross of Christ, it changes something within us. It produces “an answering love,” and this answering love is grateful and desires to please the Beloved. We experience in increasing measure what Thomas Chalmers called “the expulsive power of a new affection” which displaces the love of self that dominates our hearts with love for God. Thus surrender and obedience become willing and not compelled. We no longer think in terms of “I have to obey God” but of “I want to obey God.” And all of this is the work of the Spirit of God in our hearts.

Surrendering to God may be likened to marriage. A marriage begins with the wedding, in which two people who love each other, “forsaking all others,” commit themselves to one another, “to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part.” That is the beginning of a relationship that is full of hope and promise. But as time passes, the relationship will be tested by temptations, trials, and challenges. Each person will have to die a thousand little deaths to self along the way and be
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sustained at points not by feelings but by a commitment. But as the husband and wife remain faithful to that commitment, they will experience increasing transformation and joy as the two become one, not in word only but in heart and mind.

The life that is consecrated to God is like that. It is an exclusive, committed relationship with Someone who loves us with an everlasting love and will be faithful to us until our life’s end. It is a life of love, joy, peace, and much fruitfulness amid the temptations, trials, and tribulations of this present world. It is also a life of progressive inner transformation,

So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light, momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. (2 Cor. 4:16–18)

Such a life glorifies God and will be blessed by Christ when He returns to judge our works and distribute our rewards in the world to come.

What about those who refuse to surrender themselves to God? In this world their lives become increasingly dominated by the spirit of the world, and they do not grow to maturity or fulfill His purposes for them. They also become easy prey for the devil and his schemes and may become an embarrassment to Christ. At the judgment they face a dreadful day of reckoning. The apostle Paul said of the Lord, “We make it our aim to please him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil” (2 Cor. 5:9–10).

If even the great apostle of grace looked to the day of judgment with sobriety, it must be a very serious matter indeed for those who have been unfaithful to Christ. The purpose of this judgment will not be to determine our salvation but to evaluate our faithfulness in this life and our rewards in the next. What a tragedy it will be for believers who have not surrendered to God and lived for His glory but lived for themselves and been formed by the spirit of the world. But what a joy for those who can look into the eyes of Jesus without fear, who have eagerly awaited His coming because they loved Him, who have found perfect freedom in giving themselves to Him and His service and who delight to be with Him forever.

Notes

1. Unless otherwise noted Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version.

…it is not so much of our time and so much of our attention that God demands; it is not even all our time and all our attention; it is ourselves…

C.S. Lewis
thing we didn’t. About a year after being in our home, our older son, flipping through a picture book, asked, “Why do you have a picture of Max and his brother from the orphanage?” “Well, we were told that Max in that photo was you.” “No way. And his brother was totally crazy!”

We suppose it’s possible to develop fairly strong feelings from a photo, but falling in love with the picture is not the same as loving the flesh-and-blood person. You can make a commitment to love that person, and you could even initiate loving deeds from a distance. We had sent toys and cards with nice words to these boys in the photo. But love could deepen only through being with these boys, tending their wounds, hearing their laughter, holding their hands, engaging with their personalities. And the test of whether the commitment to love would persevere was whether we would continue to pursue what is best for them after knowing them in the flesh. Experiential knowledge allows a deeper love but can also expose the shallowness of what we think love is.

Although we made a commitment to love these boys after that brief and awkward interaction on our first trip to Russia, tests to that commitment came quickly. With little ability to communicate with them, sharing no common life experiences, seeing no resemblance to us in them, our first days as an adoptive family felt more like full-time babysitting than affectionate parenting. But we worked at putting our commitment into action, sometimes willingly and successfully, at other times with “an attitude.” We tried to understand what it was like for our sons to be suddenly immersed into a totally new culture and language with strangers as parents, grandparents, and cousins; we tried to understand the sources of their fears and frustrations, what communicated love and security to them, what helped them see their own need for Christ. The more the commitment was worked out in action, the more the knowledge grew, and as the knowledge grew, the love was deeper, the affections developed, bringing more joy to the acts of love.

This reminds us of what Jesus said as recorded in John 14:21: “Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him.” Love is evidenced by obedience to what we know. And as we obey, the relationship deepens, more is known, and love increases. As we’ve experienced this to some degree in our family life, we want to keep asking: Is my knowledge of God and His commands increasing so that my love can deepen? Or do I just love a photo of God? And is that photo I have even a correct photo? Am I consistently obeying what I do know, practicing the disciplines and engaging with His followers in ways that allow the knowledge to grow? Am I embracing the circumstances God has woven so I can know Him better and love Him more deeply? “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead” (Phil. 3:10–11).

Captivating Love

One of the first English words our younger son learned was up. One night shortly after our sons came to our home, when they were playing music in the basement, we spontaneously picked them up, started swinging them around, dancing. A big hit; they kept playing the same tracks of music over and over, pleading with us

As the feel-good tonic of professional accomplishment grows more illusory, we have grown more open to being captivated in special moments of God-sent delight.
“up, up.” This would go on until we were ready to drop; but seeing our children’s unrestrained, fully in-the-moment faces motivated us to keep going—especially the face of our older son who had arrived with so many fears and hesitations; in those moments all fears were drowned out. The totally unself-conscious display of pleasure placed these moments among the best memories of our early relationship.

Perspective-giving moments like those have been important to us, countering others that remind us of our foolishness and failures as spouses and parents. As the feel-good tonic of professional accomplishment grows more illusory, we have grown more open to being captivated in special moments of God-sent delight. At a deeper level we understand and feel the enduring, unchanging love of the one who took the very nature of a servant, humbling Himself and becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross, so that we may be citizens of heaven who look forward to the day when our lowly bodies will be like His glorious body; when we will fully experience the inheritance that will never perish, spoil, or fade. Beholding, setting our hope fully on that loving grace is the greatest stimulus to deepen our knowledge and love.

God has dealt with us gently and tenderly. Unlike many, our journey thus far has not been plagued by severe or compounded trials. No serious health or financial tests to this point. God gave us sons who have been generally happy and relatively easy to parent. We’ve been blessed with supportive family, church community, and friends. Even though our circumstances have not been extraordinary, and have been mundanely pleasant of late, we want to stay alert to the nudges to put aside our self-focus and delve into the depths of His lavish love. To be captivated in being fully known, fully loved.

And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ. (Phil. 1:8–10)

Notes

1. Scripture quotations are from the New International Version.

Douglas Gresham, adopted son of C.S. Lewis, on his step-father: “Jack was really the man to whom I looked, in respect and admiration, and, without in the least trying to, he had taken the place in my mind which a father should fill ... My feeling for Jack developed from liking and respect through admiration to, at last, some degree of understanding. It was not until quite recently that I realised that I loved Jack, and very deeply at that.”

Douglas Gresham
God promised good to John Newton and kept His word. God gave him the love of his life in his marriage to Mary Catlett. John and Mary—he called her Polly—were married on February 1, 1750. At this time John’s spiritual light “was like the first faint streaks of an early dawn, and Polly “was not lacking in polite religion, but knew nothing of a pilgrimage of faith.” However, John Newton’s spiritual understanding slowly grew and so did Mary’s.

After his marriage Newton made three voyages as the master of a slave-trading ship. During some weeks in Charleston, South Carolina, while his ship was being prepared for its return to England, Newton attended services at the Independent Church and prayed in woods and fields outside the town. On his last voyage, he met Alex Clunie in the West Indies. Clunie, a fellow ship-captain, “not only informed my understanding but his discourses inflamed my heart,” Newton wrote. From Clunie Newton learned the meaning of grace as “the free and unmerited favour of God.”

As captain of a slave ship, and a Christian, John Newton tried to deal fairly with both the crew and the slaves. After a time, however, he became troubled by the fact that his employment was “perpetually conversant with chains, bolts, and shackles,” and he prayed that God would open to him “a more humane calling.”

Newton came to hate and despise what he was doing, although most people in England saw it as a very legitimate and rewarding business. He later described “the dreadful effects of the slave trade on the minds of those who engage in it.” When the College of New Jersey (Princeton) sent word that they had given him an honorary doctor of divinity, he commented that “the dreary coast of Africa had been his university” and that he would never accept any diploma “except from the poor blacks.” Newton was amazed at what God had done for him. He wrote, “I can see no reason why the Lord singled me out for mercy . . . unless it was to show, by one astonishing instance, that with Him ‘nothing is impossible.’”

In 1754, as he waited for his ship to be prepared for another voyage to Africa, Newton suddenly became seriously ill. Doctors could not readily diagnose his sickness, but they warned him not to sail. John and Polly returned to their home in Chatham. Walking with his Bible in the Kentish hills, he enjoyed “the music of the birds in the great temple of nature, which the Lord has built for His own honour,” and was able to concentrate his thoughts in prayer and refrain from worry, either about Polly or their future.

Fully recovered from his mysterious illness, Newton secured a position in Liverpool as a tide surveyor—inspecting import cargoes. His job provided prestige and a good salary, but he was more and more convinced that he ought to be a pastor. He and Mary hosted Christian meetings in their home, and soon people began calling...
“Amazing Grace” John Newton and His Great Hymn

him “young Whitefield.” He had friends among the Dissenters, but decided that the Church of England, with all its faults, was the best way to reach people. Church officials discouraged him, pointing to his scant education but probably equally concerned by his evangelical fervor. Polly encouraged him to be patient. He wrote that she “kept me quiet until the Lord’s time came when I should have the desire of my heart. The Lord’s time is like the time of the tide, which no human power can either accelerate or retard.”

Lord Dartmouth, a prominent evangelical, offered Newton the curacy of the parish church at Olney in Buckinghamshire and persuaded the bishop of London to ordain him, nearly forty years old. The people of Olney welcomed a man who loved and cared for them, and he preached a message they could understand. He often said that the point in all his preaching was “to break a hard heart and to heal a broken heart.”

The congregation grew, and people came from near and far to seek his pastoral care and counsel. One was the talented and troubled poet, William Cowper, who moved to Olney in 1767 to be near Newton. Together they wrote and in 1779 published a volume titled Olney Hymns, which included Newton’s now-famed “Amazing Grace.”

Newton reached beyond Olney with a ministry of counsel and consolation by writing letters, published as Cardiphonia, or The Utterance of the Heart. Alexander Whyte believed that John Newton’s “most distinctive office in the great Evangelical Revival was to be a writer of spiritual letters.”

Newton’s autobiography or testimony, An Authentic Narrative, became a popular, treasured book.

In 1780 John Newton became minister at St. Mary Woolnoth in London. “London is the last situation I should have chosen for myself,” Newton said. “I love woods and fields and streams and trees—to hear the bird sing and the sheep bleat.” It was a matter of awe to him that he was called to a London church—“that one of the most ignorant, the most miserable and the most abandoned of slaves should be plucked from his forlorn state of exile on the coast of Africa and at length be appointed minister of the parish of the first magistrate of the first city in the world.”

One of the few evangelical preachers in London, Newton attracted people from all over the city to hear his sermons. One series of fifty sermons was based on the texts of Handel’s Messiah which was enjoying spectacularly successful performances at Westminster Abbey during 1784 and 1785.

Newton became much more outspoken in his opposition to the slave trade. In his Thoughts upon the African Slave Trade, Newton stated, “I hope it will always be a subject of humiliating reflection to me, that I was once an active instrument in a business at which my heart now shudders.” The 2006 film Amazing Grace highlights Newton’s influence on William Wilberforce. Newton lived to see Wilberforce’s long, hard campaign succeed when the British slave trade was abolished on March 25, 1807.

Mary Newton died on December 15, 1790. John’s love for Mary is one of the great love stories of all time. When she was away, he wrote to her, “I am always a little awkward without you, and every room where you are not present looks unfurnished.”

“Amazing Grace” was sung in churches throughout the South and was adopted by African Americans as a song that told their story as well as John Newton’s.
judicious counselor.” In his last letter to her he wrote, “I shall never find words fully to tell you how much I owe you, how truly I love you.” John Newton remembered the first anniversary of her death by writing a hymn of thirty-eight verses!

Yes, when this flesh and heart shall fail,
and mortal life shall cease,
I shall possess within the vail,
a life of joy and peace.

The earth shall soon dissolve like snow,
the sun forbear to shine;
But God, who call’d me here below,
will be forever mine.

John Newton continued to preach as long as he was able. When his eyesight began to fail, a servant stood behind him in the pulpit with a pointer to help him follow the words on his manuscript. In one sermon Newton said the words “Jesus Christ is precious,” and then repeated them. His servant, thinking he was getting confused, whispered, “Go on, go on; you said that before.” Newton, looking around, replied loudly, “John, I said that twice, and I’m going to say it again.” And then he thundered, “Jesus Christ is precious!”

Newton lingered until four days before Christmas 1807, “packed and sealed,” he quipped, “and waiting for the post.” As he died at age eighty-two, he whispered to a friend, “My memory is nearly gone. But I remember two things: that I am a great sinner, and that Christ is a great Saviour.” Newton wrote in his Letters to a Wife, “How wonderful must be the moment after death!” We wish that he could tell us about it!

In his epitaph Newton summed up his life in these words, “John Newton, once an infidel and libertine, a servant of slaves in Africa, was, by the rich mercy of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, preserved, restored, pardoned, and appointed to preach the faith he had long labored to destroy.” Newton had painted over his study fireplace at Olney words from Isaiah 43:4 and Deuteronomy 15:15—“Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, [. . .] BUT thou shalt remember that thou wast a bond-man in the land of Egypt, and the Lord thy God redeemed thee.” John Newton’s life was a good illustration of his best-known hymn.

Newton’s Hymn

Between John Newton’s death and the start of the American Civil War, the words of “Amazing Grace” crossed the Atlantic and were set to the now-familiar tune. William Walker, a singing instructor from Spartanburg, South Carolina, included it in his immensely popular hymnbook of 1835, The Southern Harmony, where Walker joined it with the tune called “New Britain.” The tune is thought to be a traditional American melody, although it may have Scottish roots. Steve Turner writes that “not only did the words fit snugly into the required musical space but the music enhanced the meaning. It was a marriage made in heaven.” And it was to become “America’s most beloved song.”

“Amazing Grace” was sung in churches throughout the South and was adopted by African Americans as a song that told their story as well as John Newton’s. Between the end of the Civil War and the start of
“Amazing Grace” John Newton and His Great Hymn

On walking in on a discussion among experts about whether any one belief is unique to the Christian faith, C.S. Lewis responded: “Oh, that’s easy. It’s grace.”

C.S. Lewis
Profile in Faith

Recommended Reading

Amazing Grace: The Story of America’s Most Beloved Song by Steve Turner

Behind our most beloved hymn is a fascinating story spanning continents, cultures, and centuries.

11. Ibid., 89.
12. Ibid., 97.
13. Ibid., 40.
14. Ibid., 103.
15. Ibid., 126.
19. Ibid., 173.
20. Ibid., 79.
21. Ibid., 132.
22. Ibid., 149.
23. Ibid., 155.
26. Ibid., 170.
29. Newton, Letters to a Wife, 297.
30. Ibid., 284.
33. Ibid., 182.
34. Turner, Amazing Grace, 91.
35. Ibid., 108.
36. Ibid., 124.
37. The new stanza, not by Newton, reads: “When we’ve been there ten thousand years, / Bright shining as the sun, / We’ve no less days to sing God’s praise, / Than when we first begun.” This stanza first appeared with “Amazing Grace” in a hymnbook in 1909. These lines, however, are found with some verses from Newton’s hymn in Harriet Beecher Stowe’s Uncle Tom’s Cabin, published in 1852. They are usually attributed to John Rees (1828–1900).
38. Turner, Amazing Grace, 189.
39. Ibid., 172.
40. Ibid., 173.
42. Turner, Amazing Grace, 175.
43. Ibid., 222–23.
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