

FROM THE PASTOR'S PEN



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GOD'S PRESENT DESIRE

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I've been reading C. S. Lewis' famous Screwtape Letters recently, coupled with critical and biblical reflection on it with a friend. The book is a series of letters written by a demon Screwtape to his nephew Wormwood, concerning Wormwood's experience in trying to tempt a particular British man away from his recent conversion to Christianity.

A recent chapter (XV) concerns the tempting of time and it caused me to reflect on this in relation to my own faith. Screwtape writes that the "Enemy," which in the book is "God," wants humans to attend to two things, "Eternity itself and to that point of time which they call the Present." And in particular, the period of time that is called the Present, is the period in which "alone freedom and actuality are offered."

The Past and the Future are much stronger material for tempting by evil, thus encouraged by Screwtape. However, he says that tempting towards the Past is of limited value – for its nature is fixed and one can actually have real knowledge of it. One, of course, can continually live in it but it doesn't necessarily make one worse. Rather, it just keeps one stuck. The Future, however, is one thing that is "least like eternity" in that is completely unknown to us. And the one advantage of tempting towards the Future is that humans can become preoccupied with "unrealities." He writes, "nearly all vices are rooted in the Future. Gratitude looks to the Past and love to the Present; fear, avarice, lust, and ambition look ahead."

Do I live in the Present with a view towards an Eternity that only God himself knows? I find myself always looking ahead. Truly, Lewis is careful to point out that preparation for potentialities in the future is no sin, but acknowledges that this carefully requires attending to the present moment with intentionality, not anxiety. The problem for me, in this regard, is twofold:

1. *Energy (of an emotional or intellectual kind) is spent on anticipating things that may or may not ever happen. There is no rest here.*

2. *I miss what's really happening now.*

One of the infinite number of blessings in having a child, is that it requires one to attend to the present moment. A parent has to respond to the present need – food, clothing, diapers, sleeping, playing. There's no quick transformation from 6 months to self-sustaining 18 years old. It's simply one hour, one day at a time. And these moments are themselves a joy that I can only experience in the "Present." So I ask myself the question: why would I allow the fixed Past (which is gone) and the unknown Future (which is not even promised to me) to cloud the joy of the Present moment? And truthfully, the "joy of the Present moment" may in fact be joyous or quite painful, but it still remains a "joy" in that it is a real moment in which I am alive in it simply by the grace of God.

The ideal horror for Screwtape, but the Present desire of our God for us, is that a Christian would attend to the present in God's strength, keeping in mind "the patience or gratitude demanded by the moment that is passing over him (or her)."

Patience and gratitude in the Present. That seems right for the job of a parent. That is essential to the calling of a Christian – for they are the grist of faith (Matthew 6:25-34).