

C.S. LEWIS

THE LESSON: A GIFT FOR EXPLAINING THE UNEXPLAINABLE

“Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.”

(Psalm 139:16)

Clive Staples Lewis, or “Jack” as he preferred to be called, was born in 1898 in northern Ireland to parents who had a great love of reading, which they passed on to Jack and to his older brother Warren. Jack was an atheist in his youth, and like many of his peers, he was swept up in the events of World War I (1914-1918), and deeply affected by his experiences in uniform.

Jack had many intellectual gifts, but the one that tied many of the others together was his ability to tell stories – the sort of stories that conveyed deeper meaning. When his schooling was finished Jack took a position teaching at Oxford, and with some of the other fellows there formed a writing club. They called themselves “the Inklings” and they would share pieces of their writing with one another to gain criticism and encouragement. One of the other Inklings was a man named J.R.R. Tolkien, a devout Roman Catholic, who would go on to write the famous “Lord of the Rings” trilogy. It was partly in response to Tolkien’s witness that Jack came to faith and went on to find a spiritual home in the Church of England.

“Those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard will understand.”

(Romans 15:21)

During World War II (1939-1945), Jack gave a series of radio talks seeking to explain the basic teachings of Christianity – without getting into any of the distracting areas that can cause disagreement among believers. Eventually these talks would be published together under the title “Mere Christianity”. This, together with many of the other books written by Jack, are called “apologetic” (which we get from the Greek word *apologia*, meaning “an explanation”) – not because they are “apologizing”, but because they explain and defend Christian belief.

In Jack’s apologetic works, his brilliant use of simile and metaphor is on full display – as, for example, when he wrote that, “When you argue against [God] you are arguing against the very power that makes you able to argue at all: it is like cutting off the branch you are sitting on” (Lewis, *Mere Christianity*). Jack’s gift for explaining profound truth creatively is also manifest in his fictional work, and especially his children’s books, “The Chronicles of Narnia”. In the Narnia series, children from the world we know travel to the imaginary land of Narnia and encounter the Christ-figure Aslan, a talking lion, who on one occasion tells them that he is also to be found in their homeland: “But there I have another name. You must learn to know me by that name. This was the very reason why you were brought to Narnia, that by knowing me here for a little, you may know me better there” (Lewis, *Dawn Treader*).

“He who goes out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, bringing his sheaves with him.”

(Psalm 126:6)

Jack was in his 50s when he began to correspond with Joy Davidman Gresham, the woman he would marry six years later. They had only a brief four years of married life together before she died of cancer, prompting Jack to share his experience of loss in the book “A Grief Observed”, in which he wrote:

“Can a mortal ask questions which God finds unanswerable? Quite easily, I should think. All nonsense questions are unanswerable. How many hours are in a mile? Is yellow square or round? Probably half the questions we ask – half our great theological and metaphysical problems – are like that”.

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Throughout his life, Jack used his remarkable gifts to explore and share his faith with honesty, intelligence and ingenuity. His work has been instrumental in bringing many people to belief in Christ, as well as in building up those who already believe. Jack died in 1963 (too late to be considered for inclusion in our Prayer Book's calendar of saints), but his legacy remains strong among Christians of every denomination to this day.

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AT-HOME CHALLENGE

Each morning and evening, follow your own rule of prayer.

(IF YOU DON'T HAVE ONE, TRY SAYING THE MORNING AND EVENING PRAYERS FROM THE "FORMS OF PRAYER TO BE USED IN FAMILIES", WHICH BEGINS ON PAGE 728 OF THE BCP. IF YOU DON'T HAVE A COPY, YOU CAN LOOK IT UP HERE: [HTTP://PRAYERBOOK.CA/RESOURCES/BCPONLINE/FAMILY-PRAYER.](http://prayerbook.ca/resources/bcponline/family-prayer))

Review today's lesson. Choose a line of scripture or a phrase from the story of Jack that you find edifying, inspiring or instructive:

Throughout this week, spend some time prayerfully reflecting on the phrase you've chosen. Discuss your reflections with a friend or a group of friends, and together commit to a concrete action you can take this week.

- AND/OR -

Take some time to pray through the following prayer.

O God, who by thy Holy Spirit hast given unto one man a word of wisdom, and to another a word of knowledge, and to another the gift of tongues: We praise thy Name for the gifts of grace manifested in thy servant Jack, and we pray that thy Church may never be destitute of the same; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (SUPPLEMENTARY COLLECT OF A DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH, POET, OR SCHOLAR, P. 317)