

Is Wormwood Your Spiritual Director?

When the book was first released in 1942, one reviewer stated, “C.S. Lewis has the rare gift of making righteousness readable.” Lewis’ brilliance allows him to avoid the triteness that plagues a lot of devotional literature. More than that, however, Lewis’ creative study offers a lot of wisdom on how to discern truth from deception in our spiritual journey.

In one letter, Screwtape responds to Wormwood’s concern that his client is starting to pray regularly. Screwtape advises Wormwood to throw various distractions at his client when he starts to pray. Wormwood is advised to make his client remember that he is hungry or that he has to attend to something around the house.

As I was reading this section I was reminded of an insight one of my professors offered me during a course I took on spiritual discernment. My professor said that if we do not have a structured time of prayer in our schedule we are really making the devil our spiritual director. If we approach our spiritual disciplines with no structure, we are placing our spiritual development on shaky ground. We are assuming that we will spend regular time in prayer and study without a plan. We are assuming that we are not prone to distraction and deception. In the name of spontaneity and authenticity we often validate a relaxed approach to spiritual formation that is at the mercy of our fickle human nature.

I know that this is true in my own life. When I do not plan to pray, or when I am without some sort of bible reading schedule, I can easily overlook these disciplines for a few days at a time. Part of the solution, I think, is to come up with a plan. Start by planning to spend 30 minutes a day in prayer and reflection on scripture. Perhaps it would help to actually set a 30 minute timer at first. It takes a while for habits to develop, so at first these patterns take some hard work.

When you think about, many of us spend very little time working on our spiritual development. For some of us, 30 minutes a day seems like a huge block of time. Yet, how much time do we spend doing other things in our life? I was challenged this summer to tithe my time by 10%. If we give just 10% of our time to God that would be 2.4 hours a day. This starts to get closer to Paul’s exhortation to the Thessalonians to pray without ceasing (1 Thess 5:17).

What are some of your thoughts on how to avoid a sporadic spiritual life that is at the mercy of the distractions and deceptions that inevitably come our way?