

The Shortest Way Home
Mere Christianity and C.S. Lewis

Intro, Narrator:

C.S. Lewis was concerned about the problems of pain and suffering in wartime England. And as a veteran of World War I, he personally experienced the horrors of battle. Now, his beloved country was in a second world war and Lewis was approached by the BBC to address his nation in a series of talks. Lewis's speeches were a candid address to his listeners on issues of faith and morality and good and evil, the same issues that are still very much with us today. These addresses contained personal stories, clever illustrations and timeless wisdom about those issues that define our idea of "mere Christianity" – the compelling case for faith, love, hope, forgiveness received from a personal and loving God.

[Opening Credits]

Narrator:

Mere Christianity is a unique work from a remarkable time in history. It appeals to both the intellect, and the heart, in building a case for Christianity.

Dr. Christopher Mitchell:

Mere Christianity began as a series of broadcast talks that came about as a result of an opening to spiritual things due to World War II and also the concern that Lewis had that Naturalism was the main doctrine being taught in schools and therefore the case for Christianity and the defense for it was not being put before people, and he wanted an opportunity to do that.

Dr. Devin Brown:

When it came to write *Mere Christianity*, which was of course broadcast talks before it was a book, there were some things going on in the world that probably had a good bit to do with it. The first thing is if we remember where Lewis came from, born in Belfast. Well, even today Belfast conjures up, what, sectarian violence between Protestants and Catholics. So Lewis goes home to a Protestant home every night as a boy and hears arguments and discussions and quarreling about what? Catholics and Protestants, Catholics and Protestants. And so when he sits down to write *Mere Christianity*, he wants no part of that world. He's going to write about the things that have been common to all Christians at all times, not that belongs to any one denomination. In the opening preface to *Mere Christianity*, Lewis puts it this way: 'The reader should be warned that I offer no help to anyone who is hesitating between two Christian denominations. You will not learn from me whether you want to become an Anglican, a Methodist, a Presbyterian or a Roman Catholic.' Lewis, from the very start, wanted to focus on *Mere Christianity*, this core set of belief that has been common to all Christians at all times. And doing this rather than focusing on the edges, focusing on the disputed points, focusing on what all Christians share instead of what they quarrel about, that's to me what makes *Mere Christianity* the great book it is.

Narrator:

C.S. Lewis gained his stature as a modern apostle for his ability to bring this unique presentation of philosophy and theology to a broad audience.

Dr. Devin Brown:

One of the reasons I like *Mere Christianity* is because for me, as a young person growing up, this was also, besides some other things, my first introduction to the world of

the mind. This was the first inkling I had as a young person that there are people who like to talk and discuss and think carefully and have this kind of exchange. And so in Mere Christianity Lewis sort of invites us to share in the way he actually thinks and to think through these things along with him. It's as though he pulls up a chair and says, 'Come, let us think together.' Another aspect of Mere Christianity that I really like is the idea that at the center of the Christian faith, we don't find something weak or vague, some watered down nothing. These beliefs that were shared, once we admit all these disputed elements, are so powerful. He calls it 'so powerful and pungent.' They have a particular taste. They stand out from other non-Christian teachings. No one that I had known before ever really quite focused on these shared beliefs. Everybody wants to talk about their own distinct beliefs. And when Lewis did, he shone a light on this and what we have there in the very center is something quite brilliant and vibrant.

Narrator:

From a starting point of reason, Lewis begins his radio talks with a discussion of human behavior. He seeks to distinguish between Natural Law and the Law of Human Nature, and to help us understand what he means, Lewis first defines these terms.

A natural law is a physical law, tested by scientific experimentation and found to be true, absolute and universal. Because of the law of gravity, I stand here, tethered to the earth, rather than adrift in the universe.

The Law of Human Nature, or the Moral Law as it is also called, is defined by our idea of ethics and morality. It's not something we need to be taught. Lewis said the law gets its name because it's our human nature to know what is right and wrong.

Dr. Christopher Mitchell:

When Lewis was asked what he would like to do on these broadcast talks, the big concern for him was again this notion of Naturalism and that the Gospel will not speak to anybody who doesn't see a need, and therefore he decided that what he wanted to do was raise a sense of conscience, a sense of right and wrong. In fact, the way he put it he wanted to make Britain 'good pagans.' And tell, in a sense, there's a view that there's something out there besides us that we're accountable to, the Gospel then has no meaning whatsoever because we think we're all right. The Gospel says we're on the wrong side of that great reality on the other side, but if you say that there is no reality out there, we're alone in the universe, it doesn't mean anything.

Rick Schenker:

Now, the very interesting thing about this is he's right in the middle of World War Two and he's thinking through this. And the country, him and the country, were asking the question and believing that their morality was right and the Nazis' morality was wrong. And if you ask anybody today, you know, 'was it just or moral for the Nazis to exterminate six million Jews,' well, you know, nearly everybody would say that was unjust and immoral. But where do they get the standard for that? That was the question that C.S. Lewis was dealing with.

Dr. Devin Brown:

Now if a person does not believe in God, where does he develop his ideas of right and wrong and just and unjust? Where, indeed! This is exactly Lewis's point. When he was an atheist, he had this feeling that there was a right and wrong, a strong sense, right? And not just his right and wrong but a standard. And as an atheist, he didn't have any place where he could say this came from. It shouldn't be there. He believed that matter

was all there was and that humankind was just meaningless random accident, right?
And he was angry at God. He, as a matter of fact, he believed there was no God. How could there be a God in such an unjust world? And then he got thinking, 'Well, why do I think it's unjust? Where do I get this standard of injustice from? And that was the crack in his atheism that began his long journey to belief.

Narrator:

Lewis is one of many philosophers and theologians to expound on the idea of the Natural Law. Aristotle wrote about a common or higher law according to nature that was different than the laws enacted by the people and Plato described the ideal society as one in which cities are established in accordance with nature.

(Cut to shot of Narrator at a coffee shop.)

Barista:

Hi.

Narrator:

Hi. Let me have a large coffee, please.

Barista:

Sure.

Narrator:

Thomas Aquinas wrote the Natural Law in which 'good is to be done and promoted and evil is to be avoided' is given by God, known by all, and applicable to all. 'The light of reason is placed by nature in every man,' Aquinas wrote, 'to guide him in his acts.'

(Cut to shot of two young women sitting at a coffee shop.)

Melanie:

You took Dr. Archer's Philosophy and Religion class last year, didn't you, Joy?

Joy:

Yeah, it was fun.

(Melanie tilts her head and makes a doubtful face.)

Melanie:

Fun isn't exactly how I would describe it.

(Joy smiles and leans in.)

Joy:

Well that depends on how you define fun, Melanie.

Melanie:

I guess. Anyway, you have to pick a book from a reading list and give a report on it. I hadn't read any of the ones before, but the one that stood out to me was C.S. Lewis's 'Mere Christianity.'

Joy:

Oh, so that's the one you picked?

Melanie:

I liked the Chronicles of Narnia movies, so I thought Lewis would be the easiest. But I was having some trouble with it and was wondering if you could help me?

Joy:

Oh, you're right. I mean, this book is a lot different from his sci-fi and fantasy books. But why do you want my help for?

Melanie:

If I recall correctly, you got an A in the class. And you're also one of my only friends who still goes to church so I thought you could give me some insight.

Joy:

Okay. So what do you want to know?

(Melanie opens her copy of "Mere Christianity". She is holding a pen in her hand as well.)

Melanie:

Uh, Lewis starts off by explaining the meaning of the universe and "the Law of Human Nature." Not sure I understand his point.

Joy:

Well, he's saying that everyone knows the difference between right and wrong. It's part of our human nature. For example, you don't have to be a Christian to know that what Hitler did was wrong. We naturally know that killing innocent humans is wrong.

Melanie:

Right. You can be an atheist and still be a moral person.

Joy:

Exactly. And that's what Lewis struggled with when he became a Christian. Where does our desire for morality come?

(Melanie takes a moment to consider what Joy has just said. She drops her pen and the Narrator picks it up and hands it to her.)

Melanie:

Thank you.

Narrator:

In the case of a scientific law, can an object choose on its own to obey or disobey the laws of gravity or motion? No, of course not. The laws of gravity or motion must be followed. But when it comes to the Law of Human Nature, can you or I simply decide not to keep it? And if we don't keep it, what proof is there that this Moral Law truly exists?

Why can't our good behavior be caused by conscience or instinct, or even taught by our parents, instead of a universal Moral Law created and put in each of us by God? And what about other cultures who have different beliefs and standards of right and wrong?

Dr. Christopher Mitchell:

Lewis's main aim at using Natural Law is not so much the differences that are there, but the fact that universally there is a sense in the human race that there's a right and a wrong. All cultures draw lines. The question is, 'Where does that come from?' And within the human experience, it's difficult to account for that just naturally, by biology. He begins to use Natural Law to raise the question, 'Perhaps this gives indication that we're

not alone in the universe. It gives indication that there is a law that's not relative but universal that we're accountable to.' And he also moves to the idea that we're all conscious of the fact that we break that law. We're on the wrong side of it. And then, from there, he begins to take the next step as to how do we account for that and moving then to Christianity.

Dr. Devin Brown:

Why do people differ in their definitions of right and wrong? Well, Lewis suggests maybe they don't, and by that he means maybe they disagree in some sort of superficial way but underneath, there's a general agreement. And he gives a couple examples. One is, for example, people have never suggested down through cultures, down through time that being selfish is a great thing. That it's better to have something larger than yourselves. Now, what this thing might be, whether it's your family or your children or your aging parents or your tribe or your nation, that may vary from culture to culture. But despite the superficial difference on the top, beneath it is the same moral law. He says the same thing about modesty, and of course there's a really easy example. The ideas of what's appropriate dress vary from culture to culture but all cultures have this sense of personal modesty and what's appropriate in different situations.

Narrator:

If our sense of right and wrong does not come from instinct or culture, then, as Lewis believes, it must be the product of a Power moving and directing the universe, evident in a law inside each of us that compels us to do right and makes us feel bad when we do wrong. Yet even with this realization, as Lewis is quick to point out, we are still not 'within a hundred miles of the God of Christian theology.'

Dr. Christopher Mitchell:

Once Lewis has established the notion of Natural Law, he begins to ask the question of where is the source of this Natural Law, where does it come from? And he eventually moves, then, to a religious answer and he begins to take into consideration perhaps Hinduism, but he says that Christianity, he believes, has the best answer for this notion. And he grounds it in the Imago Dei. He basically says it's impressed upon humans from a Christian perspective because God has created us in His image and His likeness and part of that is this notion of a conscience of right and wrong, which Lewis would say is embedded in Paul's argument, let's say, in Romans chapter 2.

Narrator:

According to Lewis, once we acknowledge that there is a Moral Law which is as tough as nails and with a Power behind it, the next step or point at which Christianity becomes a practical reality in our lives, is when we recognize that by breaking that Moral Law we affect our relationship with that Power. Simply put, we cannot have forgiveness without repentance, and we cannot have repentance without admitting we've done wrong.

Dr. Devin Brown:

We also see this reflected when we get to Lion, Witch and the Wardrobe. The first time they see Aslan, the narrator butts in to say, 'People who have never been to Narnia don't understand that a thing can be good and terrible at the same time.' But of course this is the reason why Lewis chose to make Aslan a lion. He knew that some people's God was a little too cozy, right? A little bit too much like their grandfather, and to balance this out, he said, 'Yes, He's kind and sweet. He is good, like your grandfather, but He's also terrible like a lion and His moral law hard as nails.'

Narrator:

In thinking about the Power behind the Law, Lewis refers to a concept called Dualism, in which two equal but independent powers, one good and one evil, are locked in an eternal battle for control of the universe. Some people would call the good force God and the evil force Satan or the Devil. But is this an accurate view of the existence of good and evil in the world?

Dr. Christopher Mitchell:

When Lewis begins to answer the question of the source of this impulse for right and wrong, he begins to talk about the conception, the concept of Dualism. And he says that there's a Theistic kind of approach to this, saying that this right and wrong comes from a personal God. He says, 'But there's another approach as well which looks at reality and breaks it into two equal parts: you know, one that's motivated by what we call good and one that's motivated by evil, and that there is no winning out, these are equal.' And he says that that's plausible, but it's problematic. The difficulty he is having and the current cultural context in which he's addressing is that it's moved away from Theism and from a Dualism to a Naturalism, which says that good and evil have no meaning whatsoever because they don't exist. There is no God who is ultimately good that allows evil, but there's also no, there does not exist two independent realities that are morally good and morally right. Those concepts do not exist.

Narrator:

Lewis wrote in *Mere Christianity* that 'evil is a parasite and not an original thing.' Evil exists as a distortion of goodness. How we see this playing out in our world is more like a civil war – a rebellion by a fallen, dark power, Satan, against his good and loving Creator, God.

Rick Schenker:

If we think of good and evil in terms of light and darkness, we know that light always dispels darkness without any exception. Well, if you think of good and evil in terms of opposite and opposing forces but are the same in power and weight, then there is no good triumphing over evil. But in a Christian worldview, there's always the end coming when darkness is triumphed by light and we know that darkness is going to be vanished. So, in a sense, there's coming a time when God turns on the lights, if you will, and evil is gone.

Narrator:

The rebellion began when God gave His creation free will, the liberty to choose to do right or wrong. It is true that God could have created us as mindless machines, programmed to flawless obedience. But instead He created us as unique individuals in His image, free to think and act on our own motivations and desires. Free to choose between right...or wrong.

Dr. Christopher Mitchell:

His view of good and evil is that evil is a privation of the good. Augustine had the same view. Basically, good is the absolute but movement away from that good in the opposite direction creates evil. That is a choice that God has allowed.

Narrator:

Lewis points out that God knew the risk when He gave us the power to make our own choices, but He knew it was a risk worth taking because 'free will, though it makes evil

possible, is also the only thing that makes possible any love or goodness or joy worth having.'

Dr. Devin Brown:

The problem of free will is a complicated one and Lewis looks at it in *The Problem of Pain* and says this. He says, 'Imagine if we would a universe where every time somebody tried to hit somebody over the head with a stick, God took that stick and made it as soft as a marshmallow. Well, we could actually imagine such a world but what we would have in that world, we wouldn't call free will. We would say God prevents people from hurting each other.' Lewis says that if we are going to have free will, we're gonna have the possibility of choosing right and the possibility of choosing wrong.

Narrator:

In giving His creation free will, God gives us the power to choose between following Him or arguing against Him. Yet according to Lewis, how can we argue against the very source, the Giver of reason and intellect? He believed such an act was as difficult as 'sawing off the limb you are sitting on.'

(Cut to coffee shop and Melanie and Joy, who are continuing their conversation)

Melanie:

If God knows all and loves all, then why is there injustice in the world? Why do people suffer?

Joy:

Those are great questions. I still struggle with them, too. How Lewis answers those has to do with the idea of free will: that we are free to choose right or wrong.

Melanie:

That's what I don't understand. Either we have free will and God isn't in control, or else God knows all and we don't have free will. You can't have both ways.

Joy:

Right. But this argument just isn't limited to the church.

Melanie:

What do you mean?

Joy:

Well, Einstein said that "God doesn't play dice with the universe," meaning that, according to the laws of physics, everything in the universe is pre-determined and can't be changed. But other scientists, also using the laws of physics, argue in favor of free will. We don't reject the validity of science when some scientists have opposite views on natural determination and free will. So why would we reject the reality of God when some theologians differ on this issue, too?

Melanie:

So Lewis is saying that it's our fault there's evil in the world?

Joy:

Not our fault as much as our choice.

Melanie:

But if God knows we're going to do something before we do it, doesn't that make Him responsible for it?

Joy:

How's your coffee?

Melanie:

Oh, it's great! When did they start serving Raspberry Chocolate Mocha?

Joy:

Just last week. I knew you'd try it.

Melanie:

Of course! You know I love chocolate. And raspberries!

Joy:

So how did I know you'd choose that flavor?

Melanie:

Because we're friends and you know me.

Joy:

Right. I know you, I know what you like. I know what you'd pick. So did that take away your choice?

(Melanie has an expression of realization)

Joy:

Knowing the choice you'd make doesn't take away your power to choose. You're still responsible for what you do.

Melanie:

So, in other words, I can't blame God.

(Joy shakes her head no)

Joy:

Not for the problems we create for ourselves and not for the problems inflicted on us by others. The Christian argument is that because God does love us, He gives us free will to love him back or to not love Him at all.

Narrator:

It is free will that Satan uses to convince us to look for happiness outside of God - which has led to the many problems that have plagued humanity throughout the ages: wars, greed, ambition, hatred, and sins of every sort.

If sin is the byproduct of our efforts to find happiness outside of God, then the antidote to the problem of sin is found with God and with His son, Jesus Christ, who offers forgiveness for sins.

Dr. Christopher Mitchell:

In the second book of Mere Christianity, it all basically hinges upon who is Jesus Christ because Lewis is now putting forth Christianity as the best answer to the questions that he's raised previously. But it all comes down to, 'Who is Jesus Christ?' And of course Christianity says Jesus was God. And what is the evidence for that? And the main evidence is basically because He Himself claimed to be God.

Narrator:

Some people view Jesus as a great moral teacher but deny Him as Lord.

Dr. Devin Brown:

Lewis points out that as soon as we start looking at the teachings of Christ, there's lots of good and moral advice here. Plenty of it. Very good moral advice. But there's something more, something far more.

Narrator:

Yet, if Jesus was only a teacher, a mere mortal man who made statements about his own lordship and his ability to work miracles and forgive sins, wouldn't he be thought of more as a liar or a lunatic? As Lewis states, 'either this man,' Jesus, 'was and is the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse.'

Dr. Devin Brown:

Here, Lewis makes a couple points that I think people need to listen to closely. First, he's not actually trying to convince us and argue us here that Jesus must be Lord. He says he might be Lord but he also might be a liar or lunatic. The other thing I want to point out is that he already assumes that the person here accepts that Jesus existed and that these words are His. This person who wants to make Jesus into a good moral teacher believes Jesus existed, believes these words are Him. In other words, that He wasn't a legend. Oftentimes, you'll find people criticizing Lewis's paragraph as though that's not a very good argument that He was Lord. He's not actually arguing that He's Lord. Or, well what if I don't even believe it? What if I think He was a legend? He's starting by saying someone already believes He existed and just wants to accept Him as a good moral teacher. That's the key.

Rick Schenker:

Rather than just listening to other people's opinions about Jesus, I think they have to go to the eyewitness texts themselves. I think they have to read what Jesus says, what He says about His great moral teachings, but what He says about Himself. Then they have to decide for themselves He's either one of these three things: he's either a liar, He is Lord of the Universe, or he is nuts. He's one of those three things, but He didn't leave it open to us to think that He was anything else.

Narrator:

Our relationship with Jesus and the forgiveness we find in Him through repentance of sin is the essence of the Christian life. Forgiveness is an easy concept to understand, but a difficult one to put into practice.

Rick Schenker:

It's sort of like this. If my daughter were, for some reason, charged with a crime and was given the death penalty, and somehow I could find a way to take her place, that doesn't mean that she's going to love me. But what it did was it gave her a chance to start a new life, to start over again.

Narrator:

"Repentance is no fun at all," Lewis reminds us. If we were perfect, we wouldn't need to humble ourselves and ask for forgiveness, although it would be an easy thing as perfect people to do.

Rick Schenker:

Let's face it. We can't even live up to our own standards of morality, let alone God's standard of moral perfection. So, according to Christianity, the only way to achieve that perfection is by appropriating it by accepting Jesus Christ. That's what causes God to declare us righteous. Like the Apostle Paul said, 'We have become the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus. Outside of Christ, we have separation from God forever.

Narrator:

Why is repentance and forgiveness so difficult? Because of a trait that Lewis called the Great Sin: pride. In Mere Christianity, Lewis called pride 'the complete anti-God state of mind.' How can we humble ourselves, which is what repentance calls for, when we are proud?

Lewis makes the point that a proud person cannot know God. After all, how can you look up to something – or Someone – when you are always looking down on others?

And what about this idea of 'loving the sinner but hating the sin?'

Dr. Christopher Mitchell:

The phrase, 'we are called to love the sinner but hate the sin' was something that Lewis thought much about. And for a period of his life, he thought that was really too simplistic, but came to begin to understand it in a new way and used himself as an illustration. And he said often that there were things he hated about what he did or thought and yet he continued to love himself. And so that's an example or illustration of the calling, that we are called in the same way as we deal with ourselves to deal with other people.

Narrator:

Pride is what leads some people to think they are 'good enough' to gain approval from God and others. They even begin to think that God loves them simply for being good.

Melanie:

I don't mean to be offensive, but there's a lot of religious people who are hypocrites.

Joy:

True. But there's also a lot of non-religious people who are hypocrites, too. So, why does it bother you when religious people do things they know they shouldn't do?

Melanie:

Because they preach one thing and do another.

Joy:

Right. Because you expect more from them, don't you?

Melanie:

I suppose.

Joy:

Well that's why Lewis talks about Christian behavior in 'Mere Christianity.' There's basic beliefs and basic behaviors that we expect of all Christians. And that's really what the word 'mere' means: basic.

Melanie:

Well, there's a lot of Christians who think they're better than other people.

Joy:

In some cases, they're correct.

(Melanie looks surprised)

Melanie:

So you're saying Christians are better than non-Christians?

Joy:

No. But I think they should be better than themselves. Did you read Lewis' book, 'Prince Caspian' from 'The Chronicles of Narnia'?

Melanie:

I saw the movie.

Joy:

Well, there's a line in there where Aslan tells everyone that they are descended from 'Lord Adam and Lady Eve.'

Melanie:

Right. Towards the end of the movie.

Joy:

Aslan says this should be both honor enough to raise the head of the poorest beggar and shame enough to bow the shoulders of the greatest emperor. In order for Caspian to become a king of Narnia, he had to see himself for what he was and for what he could become.

Melanie:

So our morality starts with our relationship with ourselves and with God?

(Joy nods her head in agreement)

Narrator:

According to Lewis, morality is built on relationships: the relationships we have with each other, the relationship we have with ourselves, and the relationship between ourselves and God. We can all generally agree about how we should treat each other. That type of morality – principles such as the golden rule where we do to others as they do to us –

is easy. What is more difficult is the moral battle that rages inside us, the death of self and pride that is required for the Christian life. And what is most difficult? The relationship between ourselves and God.

Dr. Devin Brown:

If we look at those three aspects of morality that Lewis defined: relationships between people, proper functioning inside the individual, and that third one that had to do with the question of who are we, why are we here, who made us, our relationship with that Power behind the Universe. He said this. He said, 'Christians and non-Christians somewhat agree on that first one, how people should behave with each other.' But he said the real differences begin in that second area. What is the proper functioning of the individual? And he said that they really become distinct in that third area where we want to answer that big question: why are we here? Where are we going? What is our eternal destiny?

Narrator:

As Lewis wrote, "I may repeat 'Do as you would be done by' till I am black in the face, but I cannot really carry it out till I love my neighbor as myself: and I cannot learn to love my neighbor as myself till I learn to love God: and I cannot learn to love God except by learning to obey Him. As I warned you, we are driven on to something more inward – driven on from social matters to religious matters. For the longest way round is the shortest way home."

Lewis describes this inward reflection as a battle 'between faith and reason on one side and emotion and imagination on the other.'

Dr. Devin Brown:

One of my favorite things about Mere Christianity is for me, personally, it showed the reasonableness of Christianity. If you went to a church like I did, my church did a great job on loving God with all your heart. We have a lot of emotions at my church and surely, we should. But it didn't do such a great job at looking at the intellect, the idea of loving God with all your mind. When I was growing up and discovered Mere Christianity like so many others before me, this was the first book that showed me how to love God with all my mind, showed me the reasonableness of Christianity.

Narrator:

Faith, like reason, is an important part of the inward life. Lewis defines faith as 'the art of holding on to things your reason has accepted, in spite of your changing moods.'

Dr. Christopher Mitchell:

I remember one class period I was teaching a course on Christian thought and a student came up afterwards and says, 'What do you do when someone just tells you that your faith is a crutch?' And my response was, 'Well, absolutely! If you don't understand the Gospel, you don't understand the fact that it is a crutch.' It's something that we lean on. It's saying that we are not sufficient unto ourselves, that we have needs, and that we need help. That's the Gospel. If you think you're self-sufficient, then there's no need for the Gospel. Now Lewis really gets at this in the fourth book of Mere Christianity. He moves to this idea that what we're called to in the Gospel is something that cannot come about by just mere morality, just good counsel, wise thinking because we're moving not to just become a little virtuous, a little better than what we were, but we're on our way to becoming sons and daughters of God, being as perfect as Jesus is perfect. And that

requires a much deeper, a much more difficult process but one in which we have help because of the assistance of the Holy Spirit.

Narrator:

Faith is a habit and practice of our belief. It's a daily reinforcement of what we know to be true through prayer, Scripture reading, and worship. So if we have faith, why do we need theology?

Imagine standing on a beach and looking at the ocean. You might hear the sound of gulls as they glide over the water or taste the salty sea air on your lips. You might feel the balmy breeze on your skin and the warmth of the sun on your face. But would you feel any of these things simply by looking at a map of the ocean? Would 'real waves' compare with 'bits of colored paper?'

Lewis believed that theology is like the map. What you experience by looking at the ocean is based on your emotions. What you experience by looking at the map is based on fact: the depth of the water, the curve of the land against the sea, the miles from one point to another. It may look and feel less real, but it is based on the true experiences of many travelers who have charted the course before you. And while you can set sail without a map, would that be wise? Of course not. A map is practical for finding your way. So is theology. It is our map to a world which we cannot yet 'touch and hear and see.'

Dr. Christopher Mitchell:

Lewis had a very high regard for theology. He considered himself a lay theologian and that's because he didn't have the formal training and therefore that's why he stayed with

what he called 'mere Christianity.' But he also is aware that there was generally a sense within British society that theology was not practical, it wasn't important. And so, right off, he begins to build a case for the importance of theology and he uses the illustration of a map. The map tells us basically where we're going and how to get there. And what he wants to say in this last book of Mere Christianity is where we're going. And that's so important. And that where we're going is to become Christ-like, become sons and daughters. And that needs to be mapped out. And that map are the Scriptures and the history of the Church's thinking on the Scriptures. That's theology.

Narrator:

Some people believe that God exists, but don't believe in Him personally. Theology is the system, the map, that helps us understand a complex God.

Dr. Devin Brown

Lewis titles book four of Mere Christianity, 'Beyond Personality.' And here's where he's going with this. They'll be people who'll say 'Well, I believe in God but not a personal God.' And he says when you do this, you're actually making God less than we are, you're making Him impersonal. And Lewis says, 'Yes, if God is this great being that we imagine He is, He's got to be something different from us but something more than us, not less, something not impersonal but supra-personal, something that is beyond personality.'

Narrator:

Take, for instance, the idea of the Trinity, of three Persons in one God. Lewis explained the Trinity by using our concept of the three dimensions.

In the first dimension, you can draw a straight line. In the second dimension, you can take your straight line, add three more to it, and make a figure, which in this case is a square. In the third dimension, you can combine six squares to make a cube.

Four lines, one square. Six squares, one cube. Three persons, one God.

Dr. Devin Brown:

How can we imagine three persons in one? He says, well, this idea of, well, a cube is made up of six individual parts that always remain individual parts, might give us a faint idea of what that being 'beyond personality' might be like.

Narrator:

Why is it important to believe that there are three Persons in one God? Lewis believed that to say that "God is love" requires a multi-personed God because 'love is something someone has for another person.'

Dr. Devin Brown:

Lewis suggests that when some people say 'God is love,' they're saying something like, 'There's something divine about our feelings of love. There's something other worldly about this emotion' and Lewis agrees, yes, there is. But when he says we turn to when God is love means something more than love is God. And what he says is this: he says, 'Imagine the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, God in three persons, existing outside of time for eons before anyone was here and loving each other, this living dynamic personality is, in fact, love. God in three persons is love.'

Narrator:

Thinking back to our example of the ocean, if we want to get wet, we have to get into the water. If we want to maintain the Christian life, we have to get caught up in the union of God and Son and Spirit.

Dr. Christopher Mitchell:

The important thing about the Trinity is that it's behind all things and it's something that we must believe in.

Narrator:

Once we are caught up in this divine union, we then begin to spread what Lewis calls "the good infection", meaning we carry Christ to others. We become like mirrors, reflecting Christ to the world. And just as a dirty telescope obscures our view of the stars, so an unclean life muddies the reflection of Christ that others see through us.

This is why Lewis tells us to never put our whole faith in another person, not even the best person in the whole world. After all, we make mistakes. We let people down. Christ never does.

(Melanie is checking her makeup)

Melanie:

I don't know. I guess I just don't see the difference religion makes.

Joy:

You mean in our daily lives?

Melanie:

Yeah. I mean I guess it's important for churches, but I don't see how it helps me to be a better person. We both know people who say they're religious but they're just fakes.

Joy:

Well, Lewis addresses those too.

(Melanie puts down the compact and looks at Joy)

Melanie:

You mean how religion makes a difference? Or that there are too many pretenders?

Joy:

Both...

(Joy reaches over and taps Melanie's compact)

Joy:

. . . plus the mirror.

(Melanie looks doubtful)

Joy:

Lewis says there are two types of pretenders. Those who are fake and those who are practicing.

Melanie:

What's the difference?

Joy:

A fake only pretends to help you. They don't really mean what they say. Lewis says those are the bad type of pretenders.

Melanie:

Are there good ones?

Joy:

Yes. Lewis says the good pretenders are like children playing grown-up. They're not trying to deceive you. They are playing - practicing for the real thing.

Melanie:

So are you saying Christians aren't legit?

Joy:

Well, yes and no. But most of us are practicing. We haven't arrived yet.

Melanie:

Arrived at what?

Joy:

At being like Christ, a goal we keep striving toward but will never reach here. So we practice being like Jesus, using the teachings all Christians uphold to, what we call theology, as the instructions.

(Melanie holds up her compact)

Melanie:

And the mirror?

Joy:

Lewis says we're the mirrors. We are not the real thing, but we can strive be like Jesus in the things we do, practicing for the day we'll be like him.

(Joy picks up Melanie's book and opens to the chapter "Let's Pretend." She points out the passage and hands it to Melanie.)

Joy:

Look, near the back of the book.

Melanie:

I haven't gotten that far yet.

Joy:

You'll like it. He retells this old story of this unattractive man who puts on this beautiful mask, and he wears it for so many years that when he finally takes it off, he's beautiful,

just like the mask. Let's face it. Christians don't always look as good as they should, but every day we're in the process of being transformed. And I think that's something we all can appreciate.

Narrator:

There are many reminders of the Christian life in the natural world around us. Jesus said in the Gospel of John that He is the vine and we are the branches. We are told in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke that we are known by our fruit. Yet we know that trees don't always produce good fruit and people do not always harvest the good fruit of the Christian life.

C.S. Lewis saw it this way. If this tree, for example, had a disease, should we just snip off a branch? Or should we cut down the whole tree and plant a new one in its place? Likewise, has Christ come, as Lewis said, to torment our old self? Or to kill it? Or to replace it with a new self? Christ's self.

Christianity is easy in that Christ wants every part of our lives. He wants our good thoughts and kind deeds, but also our pride and temptations and sins. This seems hard for us – to turn over those things to Christ that we would rather keep to ourselves. But it is much easier than what we are trying to do – which is try to keep our old selves intact by following our heart and its pleasures and yet also be 'good' enough to live the Christian life. Especially since, as Lewis observes, the more we obey our conscience, the more it demands.

Dr. Christopher Mitchell:

Towards the end of *Mere Christianity*, Lewis raises the question, 'Is Christianity hard or easy?' And he says, 'It's both.' It's hard because what God is after is perfection, which is going to require that we kill our self. There's this sort of death to self and allowing ourselves to become completely gods. That's very, very difficult. It's easier, however, he says than what we are normally doing in our experience, and that is trying to kill part of ourselves, but trying to keep part of it as well, and he says that will never happen.

Narrator:

Christ commands us to be perfect, which can only happen when we give ourselves wholly to Him. Only then can we experience a changed life as Christ spreads deeper and deeper into every fiber of our being. This process of being absorbed by this new life is the difference, Lewis points out, between paint that is only applied to the surface and a dye or stain that soaks all the way through.

The Lord tells us that we will be made perfect. In fact, if we should choose to turn ourselves over to this work, He clearly reminds us in the Scriptures that He will not stop until it is complete. This commitment, however, is not to be taken lightly and Lewis advises us that we should all 'count the cost' before becoming Christians.

Dr. Christopher Mitchell:

Lewis was a realist, and before he finished *Mere Christianity*, he needed to raise the question, you know, 'What's the cost of following Jesus?' He wanted to warn us what we were in for if we really take this Christian road seriously. And he basically says what you're in for is moving from where you're at to perfection. God is serious, more serious than we are. That's what he's about. He wants to come to the point where He can say

at the benediction upon us that He said to His Son, 'This is my son, this is my daughter, with whom I am well pleased.' And in order to do that, it means we're going to have to deal with our self-centeredness, our greed, our covetousness, our pettiness, just all kinds of vices that we have that we want to ignore, that we want to sort of excuse, that we want to rationalize. He says, 'No.' Now we can only do so much this side of Heaven, but He's going to try to get as much done as possible. And if you don't want this process, if you don't want to go for perfection, then you better bail right now because that's the only help God's going to give us, and that is perfection.

Narrator:

Counting the cost is important because while the Lord will work on those parts of our lives that we want to improve – our bad habits and sins that we acknowledge are devastating to ourselves, our relationships, our career – He will also transform those areas of our lives that we may think are just fine and not in need of improvement.

Rick Schenker:

This is one of those places where he uses another analogy – he's great at analogies – and he talked about how when he was a kid he'd do anything not to go to the dentist. He said, you know, when you went to the dentist for something because it hurt, then they started poking around at others things that didn't hurt yet and, you know, they wanted to get your mouth to perfection because you went in there for what hurt and he didn't like that. He says, well, that's the way Christ is. He wants us perfect and so when we make Him our Lord, He commits to making us perfect and its a struggle sometimes. He said you can push Him away if you want to, but if you don't, He's going to try and see the job through.

Narrator:

Lewis wrote in *Mere Christianity* that whatever the cost to us, whether suffering in this life or purification after death, and whatever the cost to the Lord Himself, he will not stop until we are made perfect – until God the Father is pleased with us, just as He was with Christ. This perfection, however, is not immediate.

The process of perfection is a lot like a human being learning to walk. Just as a parent is pleased with a baby's first wobbly steps, so God is pleased at our first steps of obedience toward perfection. And when we fall down? Not to worry. God is there to pick us up again.

Dr. Devin Brown:

Each time we fall, God will be there to pick us up. Each time we make a small, feeble step, God will be delighted in it and be happy. And each time we're ready for the next lesson, God will be ready with our next lesson.

Narrator:

So once we give ourselves to the process of becoming perfect, life should become easier, right? In the beginning, it may seem so, especially once we are rid of the habits and sins that caused us so much trouble. Then we begin to think that because we are making such progress, everything should go well for us. We should be strong enough to endure temptations. We shouldn't be bothered with sickness, money troubles, failed relationships, career setbacks. 'It seems to us all unnecessary,' Lewis wrote, 'but that is because we have not yet had the slightest notion of the tremendous thing He means to make of us.'

Dr. Christopher Mitchell:

Towards the end of *Mere Christianity*, Lewis raises the question, 'What is Christianity all about: producing nice people or new people, new men in Christ?' And he addresses the nice people because there's a misconception, he says, and he faced it all the time that Christianity's just trying to make us nice, and therefore if you're Christian, you'd be nicer than non-Christians. And he says that's not necessarily the case. We are to become nice, and in fact, as he says, we're to become perfect. But sometimes we start out very defective. For example, Evelyn Waugh, who's a British writer, very acerbic kind of personality, came, had a conversion experience and came to Christ and early on, someone chastised him because he did something that wasn't very Christian, as it were. And he agreed, but he says, 'Could you imagine what I'd be like if I wasn't a Christian?' What Lewis addresses is the idea that somehow all Christians are supposed to be better, or nicer, than non-Christians. And he's saying eventually they will be, but not necessarily in the beginning, and actually he appeals to all circles. You can always take the worse case of any group of people and characterize that. And we, as Christians, shouldn't do that to other groups, but it's the same here with Christianity. Now, he's saying it would be a problem if a person becomes a Christian and doesn't make progress. We should be making progress and eventually become nicer people than non-Christian people, and in fact, as he says we will eventually become perfect, absolutely good, extremely nice, but that's not the case in the beginning, and we need, in a sense, to take that into account as we are looking. We're all in process.

Narrator:

The journey of becoming perfect begins in this life and is continued in death. Each of us will experience different degrees of perfection here on earth and some people don't seem to change much at all in this new life in Christ.

This may be why so many people raise the question, 'If Christianity is true, why aren't all Christians nicer than all non-Christians?'

Rick Schenker:

At the university today, this comes up a lot. What about the behavior of some of these Christians? And you know those are legitimate things. We need to watch our behavior. But, you know, when we're talking about this, in all seriousness when it comes to truth, we've got to say, 'Listen, Christians are people that have realized that they need forgiven and they constantly need forgiven.' But the fact is, we still go back to these questions: is Christianity true? Did Jesus raise from the dead or did He not? Is He who He says He is or was He a nut? Those are the questions that all people have to come back to, regardless how a Christian is acting. And they also need to understand that Christianity is a process. Like Lewis said, we're being taken through a process. We're under new management, and sometimes the management has to work with us to get us functioning the best way possible, and that's what Jesus does within us.

Dr. Christopher Mitchell:

I could give an illustration of my mother who came to faith twelve years before she died: a very wounded, bitter woman. And in the early stages, it was still difficult to relate to her but by the time twelve years later she died, the change was amazing. And that's what Lewis is trying to say. Jesus isn't just about trying to make us better. He's trying to make us perfect, a new creation.

Narrator:

According to Lewis, when Christians are careless in words and actions to the outside world, they cast doubt on the very truth of Christianity.

Dr. Christopher Mitchell:

When I first read *Mere Christianity*, two things really jumped out at me, appealed to me. The first one was what Lewis would have called the highest common factor, the power of what all the major strands of Christianity held in common and how significant that was. The other thing that I found compelling and so important is that we have this tendency to think that the Gospel is sort of a “get out of jail free” card. That the reason Jesus did His work was to keep us out of Hell. But the real reason is to make us like Christ, to make us sons and daughters of God, and he hits hard on that, especially towards the end of the book.

Rick Schenker:

At the university, *Ratio Christi* is involved in breaking down the division that people see between faith and reason because they go together. We teach students that Christianity is true, it's based on evidence. We give them the philosophical, the historical, and scientific reasons for following Jesus Christ. Now the university today is a very hostile place towards Christianity, and I think of one student at Ohio State who came to one of the programs we put on, one of the lectures, and this is a quote from her. She said, ‘Everybody made me feel stupid for believing in God ever since I got to college. I gained my faith back after the first lecture. It was amazing.’ Now that's what needs done in this culture is that we need to reach out to people with the truth that Christianity is true or it's not, that Jesus is who He says He is or He was a nut, and one of the best ways to do that is to bring them this evidence.

Narrator:

In Mere Christianity, C. S. Lewis reminds us that we must give up ourselves to find ourselves and we must lose our lives so that we may find them again. He tells us to submit to death to find eternal life and to keep nothing back. 'Look for yourself,' Lewis says, 'and you will find in the long run only hatred, loneliness, despair, rage , ruin and decay. But look for Christ and you will find Him, and with Him everything else thrown in.'

When you do this, you will find that the longest way round is truly the shortest, and the only, way home.