

A Collection of C.S. Lewis Letters



Edited by C.M. Forrest

INTRODUCTION

Letters can unlock understanding for topics you never knew you might be curious about, while also expanding on ideas you never would have considered otherwise.

Recently, I got to thinking about the author and professor, C. S. Lewis. For most of my life, whenever I thought of C. S. Lewis, all I had the capacity to recall was that he was friends with J.R.R Tolkien, and that he wrote *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Those two facts were not substantial enough to give me much of an idea about the man himself.

That all changed this month though. I came across a letter C. S. Lewis wrote to a fan of his works with whom he kept a correspondence for many years. In the letter, he gave several pieces of writing advice and the points he made really spoke to me. Interested, I began to explore and think about this author from my childhood. That interest led me to an assortment of letters written by C. S. Lewis to fans of his books and members of his family.

Put simply, these letters shocked me. The most astounding aspect of them was how they expanded my knowledge of this author I had hardly considered as a real person. These letters forced me to believe the fact that C. S. Lewis was a wholly formed human, who had desires, aspirations, fears, daily routines, and so many other qualities that I had never once deemed him to have. It makes perfect sense for C. S. Lewis to have siblings, favorite subjects, and least favorite foods. He is human after all, just like the rest of us.

But the humanity of C. S. Lewis was never something I had examined. At least, not until I was face to face with his earnest words through his letters. I was all but confronted with undeniable proof that this man had lived a life with as many complexities as my own life

contains. It is an experience both humbling and exciting, and something that can only occur through the personal nature of a letter.

Sometimes, in his letters, C. S. Lewis would mention the recent events taking place in his life. Whether it is caring for his family and pets during a winter storm, or being extremely busy grading papers as a professor, I was dumbfounded by how realistic and relatable these kinds of statements are. These letters can be very vulnerable, which adds to their compelling qualities.

Out of all the reasons these letters are valuable to me, the most significant is the care that C. S. Lewis shows for his readers. His apparent interest is evident in his longer letters of advice. One mother in the United States of America sent a letter to C. S. Lewis about the plight of her son, who had read the *Narnia* books and as a result had something of a mini religious crisis. C. S. Lewis took great care in his response letter and expressed his sorrow over having caused the dilemma, while also offering advice applicable to both mother and son. C. S. Lewis found himself in a potentially funny position, but he treated it seriously and with much consideration. The way he responds to his letters is rather telling of his character, and allows the reader to feel a greater connection with him and his works.

The other way that C. S. Lewis illustrated his regard for his readers was through the beginning and ending of letters. Every word holds the utmost attention for the experiences of his fans. Lots of his letters begin with a "thank you" to the reader for simply enjoying his books and for taking the time to tell him as much. The way C. S. Lewis ends his letters is also full of emotion. I was often sent reeling with the pure pleasantness or unrestrained vulnerability of his send-offs. Whenever he ended his letters with a "I'll have you in my prayers," I felt like my feelings had been sucker-punched because of the simplistic sincerity dripping off of the words. Each time he signed the letter, "Yours sincerely," I believe that he meant it. The emotional openness and true genuineness of his sentiments got to me every single time. That effect is something that only a letter can achieve.

After experiencing these letters, I feel much more appreciative of C. S. Lewis than I have ever felt before. When he describes becoming excited by the beginning of winter and how

beautiful the snow looks, I can't help but feel a kinship with this man who I will never have the chance to meet. The ability to feel a connection with someone that is separated from you by time and space reminds me that:

A letter is a very special thing.

I thought I knew all I wanted to know about C. S. Lewis, but these letters changed that. Each of these letters gave me a different glimpse into a side of this author that I never knew I needed. I am truly amazed by the wealth of emotions I felt reading these letters, and I hope you'll feel something special by reading these too.

Yours sincerely,
-Chloe Forrest

LETTERS

21 March 1953

Dear Michael

I see I have thanked your Father for a kind present which really came from *you*. Let me now say Thank *you*, very much indeed. I think it was wonderful of you. At least I know that when I was a boy, though I liked lots of authors, I never sent them any-thing. The reason there is so much boiled food here is, of course, that we have so little cooking-fat for roasting or frying.

The new book is The Silver CHAIR, not CHAIN. Don't look forward to it too much or you are sure to be disappointed. With 100,000 thanks and lots of love.

yours
C. S. Lewis

Magdalen College
Oxford
May 29th. 1954

Dear Fifth Graders

I am so glad you liked the Narnian books and it was very kind of you to write and tell me. There are to be 7 of them altogether and you are already one behind. No. 4, The Silver Chair, is already out.

You are mistaken when you think that everything in the books "represents" something in this world. Things do that in The Pilgrim's Progress's but I'm not writing in that way. I did not say to myself "Let us represent Jesus as He really is in our world by a Lion in Narnia": I said "Let us suppose that there were a land like Narnia and that the Son of God, as He became a Man in our world, became a Lion there, and then imagine what would happen." If you think about it, you will see that it is quite a different thing.

So the answer to your first two questions is that Reepicheep and Nick-i-brick don't, in that sense, represent anyone. But of course anyone in our world who devotes his whole life to seeking Heaven will be like Reepicheep], and anyone who wants some worldly thing so badly that he is ready to use wicked means to get it will be likely to behave like N[ick-i-brick]. Yes, Reepicheep did get to Aslan's country. And Caspian did return safely: it says so on the last page of The [Voyage of the] "Dawn Treader". Eustace did get back to Narnia, as you will find when you read The Silver Chair. As for who reigns in Narnia to-day, you won't know till you have had the seventh and last book.

I'm tall, fat, rather bald, red-faced, double-chinned, black-haired, have a deep voice, and wear glasses for reading.

The only way for us to [get to] Aslan's country is through death, as far as I know: perhaps some very good people get just a tiny glimpse before then.

Best love to you all. When you say your prayers sometimes ask God to bless me,

Yours ever,
C. S. Lewis

12 July 1954

Dear Joan

I am so busy marking examination papers that I can hardly breathe! The very good ones and the very bad ones are no trouble, but the in-between ones take ages. Thanks for telling me the bits you liked (Yes. I have old copies). Chautauqua sounds lovely. In great haste,

Yours ever
C. S. Lewis

6 May 1955

Dear Mrs. K....,

Tell Laurence from me, with my love:

1/ Even if he was loving Aslan more than Jesus (I'll explain in a moment why he can't really be doing this) he would not be an idol-worshipper. If he was an idol-worshipper he'd be doing it on purpose, whereas he's now doing it because he can't help doing it, and trying hard not to do it. But God knows quite well how hard we find it to love Him more than anyone or anything else, and He won't be angry with us as long as we are trying. And He will help us.

2/ But Laurence can't really love Aslan more than Jesus, even if he feels that's what he is doing. For the things he loves Aslan for doing or saying are simply the things Jesus really did and said. So that when Laurence thinks he is loving Aslan, he is really loving Jesus: and perhaps loving Him more than he ever did before. Of course there is one thing Aslan has that Jesus has not—I mean, the body of a lion. (But re-member, if there are other worlds and they need to be saved and Christ were to save them as He would—He may really have taken all sorts of bodies in them which we don't know about.) Now if Laurence is bothered because he finds the lion-body seems nicer to him than the man-body, I don't think he need be bothered at all. God knows all about the way a little boy's imagination works (He made it, after all) and knows that at a certain age the idea of talking and friendly animals is very attractive. So I don't think He minds if Laurence likes the Lion-body. And anyway, Laurence will find as he grows older, that feeling (lik-ing the lion-body better) will die away of itself, without his taking any trouble about it. So he needn't bother.

3/ If I were Laurence I'd just say in my prayers something like this: "Dear God, if the things I've been thinking and feeling about those books are things You don't like and are bad for me, please take away those feelings and thoughts. But if they are not bad, then please stop me from worrying about them. And help me every day to love You more in the way that really matters far more than any feelings or imaginations, by doing what you want and growing more like You." That is the sort of thing I think Laurence should say for himself; but it would be kind and Christian-like if he then added, "And if Mr. Lewis has worried any other children by his books or done them any harm, then please forgive him and help him never to do it again."

Will this help? I am terribly sorry to have caused such trouble, and would take it as a great favor if you would write again and tell me how Laurence goes on.

I shall of course have him daily in my prayers. He must be a corker of a boy: I hope you are prepared for the possibility he might turn out a saint. I daresay the saints' mothers have, in some ways, a rough time!

Yours sincerely,
C. S. Lewis

Magdalene College,
Cambridge
16 October 1955

Dear Joan

Thanks for your letter of the 3rd. In this country we hardly ever have any snow worth talking about till January, or later. Once we had it at Easter after all the trees had their spring leaves on. So the snow could lie on the trees far heavier than if they had been bare, and there was great destruction in the way of broken branches. We had our first frost last night—this morning the lawns are all grey, with a pale, bright sunshine on them: wonderfully beautiful. And somehow exciting. The first beginning of the winter always excites me; it makes me want adventures. I expect our autumn has gentler colours than your fall and it goes far slower. The trees, especially beeches, keep their leaves for weeks & weeks after they have begun to change colour, turning from yellow to gold & from gold to flame-colour.

I never knew a guinea-pig that took any notice of humans (they take plenty of one another). Of those small animals I think Hamsters are the most amusing—. And, to tell you the truth, I'm still fond of mice. But the guinea pigs go well with your learning German. If they talked, I'm sure that is the language they'd speak.

Yours ever
C. S. Lewis

Dec 30th. 1956

My dear Sarah

Thank you for the beautiful little jar. I am trying to think of some treasure choice enough to put in it. I am also v.[ery] ashamed of not having sent you a card this Christmas. But I've really been snowed under.

All domestic help was away for its holidays. I have a sick (very sick) wife to visit daily in hospital. At home I had to look after a sick* brother, 2 schoolboy stepsons, one dog, one cat, four geese, umpteen hens, two stoves, three pipes in danger of freezing; so I was pretty busy and pretty tired. Well, all good wishes to all of you and here's a new-year's gift.

With Love
C. S. Lewis

*SICK. It looks like RICH (he isn't!)

The Kilns, Kiln Lane,
Headington Quarry,
Oxford
29th March 1961

Dear Jonathan.

Yours is one of the nicest letters I have had about the Narnian books, and it was very good of you to write it. But I'm afraid there will be no more of these stories. But why don't you try writing some Narnian tales? I began to write when I was about your age, and it was the greatest fun. Do try!

With all best wishes,

yours sincerely,
C. S. Lewis

C. S Lewis wrote hundreds of letters throughout his life. From friends, to family, to fans, C. S. Lewis wrote to them all. Each letter, both long and short, showcases elements of his humor, his life, and his values in a way that is engaging and truly fascinating in a way that only a letter could achieve. Featured in this collection are seven of C. S. Lewis' most emblematic letters to the people in his life that can be appreciated by those familiar and unfamiliar with him and his works.



Chloe Michelle Forrest is a student at the University of Colorado Colorado Springs and is working toward achieving her Bachelor's Degree in English Literature alongside a Minor in Digital Communications. An enthusiastic reader, writer, and crocheter, Chloe is always looking for a new creative pastime to fill her days. She would like to thank her parents, siblings, friends, and neighborhood cats for constantly supporting and inspiring her to do her best.