

BY JENNA DEWITT

WHO IS

# C.S. LEWIS

**Clive Staples Lewis' work is commonly regarded as the standard introduction into Christian apologetics**, studied in both elementary school reading classes and university theology courses. Most recently, a new generation was introduced to his enduring legacy by the "Chronicles of Narnia" film series.

Known as "Jack" to friends and family, he was born in Belfast, Ireland in 1898 to Christian parents. After a childhood marked by the death of his mother to cancer and a series of nightmarish boarding schools, he embraced atheism in his teens. He wrote in his memoirs, "Surprised by Joy," "I maintained that God did not exist. I was also very angry with God for not existing. I was equally angry with Him for creating a world."

Lewis witnessed unspeakable suffering, death and terror in the trenches of World War I, which led him to deeper questions of meaning, purpose and morality. After the war, he graduated from Oxford with top honors. While teaching there, he joined a prolific writing club known as the Inklings which offered both literary criticism and good-natured fellowship. J.R.R. Tolkien and Hugo Dyson discussed the issue of faith with Lewis, eventually leading him to accept the possibility of God, first as a theist, and later, as a Christian.

"I gave in and admitted that God was God, and knelt and prayed," he wrote in "Surprised by Joy." "Perhaps, that night, the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England."

His unexpected conversion directly influenced his first major success, "The Screwtape Letters," which described

spiritual warfare through the letters of a demon advising his nephew on proper methods of tempting his assigned human. "The Chronicles of Narnia" expanded his popularity throughout the '50s, providing children with a new way to personally identify with their faith. Parents even wrote to Lewis worried that their children were starting to love the central character, Aslan, as much as they loved Jesus.

"[He] can't really love Aslan more than Jesus, even if he feels that's what he is doing," Lewis wrote one concerned mother and son. "**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."

The widespread popularity of both his fiction and "layman's apologetics" like "Mere Christianity" generated countless letters, nearly all of which Lewis answered himself. Joy Davidman Gresham, a divorced American writer with two sons, developed a deep correspondence friendship with Lewis, which led her to move her family to Oxford. When her work permit to live in Britain expired, Lewis married her in a civil ceremony, keeping one of his closest friends by his side. It wasn't until she was diagnosed with advanced cancer that their romantic love blossomed. Their Christian wedding took place in the hospital soon after. After a miraculous recovery and three years of remission, cancer struck once again. Joy died in 1960, leaving Lewis with two stepsons and a grief that shook his famous faith. Under a pseudonym, he published "A Grief Observed," describing his journey back to peace

with God. Ironically, his friends recommended it to him to read, not knowing he was the author.

Lewis died on Nov. 22, 1963, but his death was overshadowed by the John F. Kennedy assassination that same day. He is buried with his brother Warren at Holy Trinity Church in Oxford.

"It's very easy to get fascinated by Jack's development as a human being or fascinated by the development of his literature, but all of the time, no matter what the subjective angle of one's own interests are, to look beyond that to the power of the Holy Spirit of God behind it, governing it, guiding Jack all of the time, that's what's really important. Jack himself is much less important."

- Douglas Gresham (Lewis' adopted stepson and biographer)



Jenna DeWitt is the managing editor of MORF magazine. She graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in Journalism from Baylor University, where she served as editor of Focus magazine and Arts and Entertainment editor of The Baylor Lariat. Jenna loves Christian music, Great Britain and all things Baylor.

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