



BE
Still.

Wisdom in a Time of WAR

THOUGHTS AND READINGS FOR MEDITATION

What Oswald Chambers and C.S. Lewis teach us about living through the long battle with terrorism.

By J.I. Packer

SO WE ARE AT WAR. THE UNITED States leads a loose international coalition pledged to destroy the worldwide terrorist networks, which produced the 19 young men who on September 11 randomly killed thousands of civilians and destroyed billions of dollars worth of flagship property.

America's war aim is not just retributive justice (though it certainly is that, as far as the terrorists are concerned). It is primarily to prevent such attacks in the future by eliminating their source. War is always evil, but in our nightmare

scenario, where more terrorism as a follow-up is confidently promised, a war of suppression appears to most as the lesser evil. However burdensome, it is surely the best and only rational course.

We need to be clear that terrorism, whether religiously, politically, or ideologically motivated, begins as a mindset—what the Bible calls a thought of the heart. In this case, alienated persons are driven by bitterness at real or fancied wrongs, by some form of racial or class hatred, and by utopian dreams of better things after the present order has been smashed. This is an explosive mix.

Terrorists think of themselves as both victims and avenging angels. They act out their self-justifying heartsickness in a way that matches Cain killing Abel. They see themselves as clever heroes, outsmarting their inferiors by concealing their real purpose and by overthrowing things they

say are contemptible. So their morale is high, and conscience does not trouble them. Gleeful triumphalism drives terrorists on; they are sure they cannot lose. This is what the anti-terrorism coalition is up against. It is only realistic to anticipate that ridding the world of terrorism will be a long job.

Terrorism is something countries like Ireland and Israel know all about, having lived with local forms of it for decades, and now America must face it too. It would be silly to deny that the prospect is daunting, indeed traumatic. Jesus spoke of a day when men's hearts would faint with fear and foreboding of what was about to come on the world (Luke 21:26). Such a day may not be far off. Here and there, it seems a measure of panic has already begun to appear.

Where may we find godly wisdom to face days like these? One source is the teaching

"Let us not break the command that says, 'Cast thy burden on the Lord.'"

"HE KNOWETH THY WALKING THROUGH THIS GREAT WILDERNESS." DEUTERONOMY 2:7



Oswald Chambers

of two 20th-century British veterans of the Cross. One was a Baptist minister, Oswald Chambers, who died in 1917 at age 43 of complications following an appendectomy. At the time, he was serving as a YMCA chaplain with the British Commonwealth forces in Egypt.

The other was an Oxford don, C. S. Lewis, who was in the trenches during the first World War and who, during World War II, taught basic Christianity to the troops, to Oxford undergraduates, and to the whole English nation by a series of books, broadcasts, and addresses. He died of kidney failure in 1963 at age 64. Chambers, little known in his own lifetime, became a Christian icon only when his widow compiled and published *My Utmost for His Highest* in 1927; Lewis gained that status with the success of *The Problem of Pain*, published in 1940.

Chambers and Lewis might seem an odd couple to pair up, but they had much in common. As their admirers already know, each had a brilliant mind, a stout faith, an uncannily empathetic and perceptive imagination, and a masterful way with words. Each was a teacher by instinct and gift. Each was spiritually honest and down-to-earth to an almost frightening degree. Each was well versed in the Western theological heritage, and in Western philosophy, literature, and history. Each adored the Lord Jesus Christ unstintingly as his Saviour and Master. And each had a similar approach to the nitty-gritty of living through a war.

To be sure, Lewis, the Anglo-Catholic, would not have endorsed Chambers' acceptance of the Wesleyan belief in entire sanctification; and Chambers, the evangelical, would have felt that Lewis' treatments of biblical inspiration and the Atonement were a bit loose. But that is irrelevant here. The two men shared a full belief in the triune God, original sin,



Joshua Behrens 2001

redemption and regeneration through Jesus Christ, and in the reality of God's sovereign control of all that happens. Against this background, the convergence of their thinking about spiritual life when surrounded by war is less surprising.

For any who wish to verify what I am about to report, the main evidence on Chambers is in the volume of his Complete Works, published in 2000, and in David McCasland's *Oswald Chambers: Abandoned to God* (1993). Lewis'

They believed that informed thought is integral to the process of discipleship.

thoughts are most clearly focused in *The Screwtape Letters* (1942) and his Oxford sermon, "Learning in War-time", which he preached in October 1939.

The war itself was never the subject of what Lewis and Chambers said, only part of the predicate. As neither politicians nor prophets but Christian nurturers, they took people in perplexity of need as their subject. They discussed war, with its unforeseeable outcomes and certain distresses, as only one of life's incidentals (granted, a huge one) with which we must learn to deal.

What, then, did they have to say about living with war? Basically, it was the same as they regularly said to help people live for God in this fallen world. It can be set out thus:

First, we must think. It is no surprise that



C. S. Lewis

Lewis, a university teacher, should have cast all he said as a Christian spokesman and apologist as an argument. (See *Mere Christianity*, *The Problem of Pain*, *Miracles*, and *God in the Dock* for starters.) Demanding critical thought for the developing of discernment is, after all, what Oxbridge education was (and still is) all about. It is more surprising that Chambers, long the chief speaker for the League of Prayer, a body promoting a second-blessing experience, should have stressed so constantly the need to grapple with life's big questions and urged so strongly that thinking was vital for spiritual growth and maturity.

The truth is that Chambers and Lewis were teachers to their fingertips. They knew that the unthinking—professed Christians no less than others—live perforce on prejudices, moods, and knee-jerk reactions that keep them from wisdom. They believed that informed thought is integral to the process of discipleship. And so Chambers' word to a man who read only the Bible and books about it, and who felt stuck and inarticulate, was: "The trouble is you have allowed part of your brain to stagnate for want of use." The man later wrote, "There and then, [Chambers] gave me a list of over 50 books, philosophical, psychological, theological, covering almost every phase of modern thought," leading to "a revolution which can only be described as a mental new birth"—just as Chambers had hoped.

Conversely, Lewis' didactic devil *Screwtape* warns his naïve nephew and protégé, Wormwood, that humans must at all costs be distracted from pursuing truth by active thought. "The trouble about argument is that it moves the whole struggle onto the Enemy's own ground... By the very act of arguing, you awake the patient's reason; and once it is awake, who

can foresee the result?" Serious thinking about life's basic questions is never ultimately on the devil's side; Lewis knows this and makes Screwtape acknowledge it.

Second, we must think about our own lives. Both teachers agreed that:

- God gives us life to live for his glory.
- Since the Fall, tragedy, distortion, frustration, and waste have been the regular marks of life in this world.
- Reason (with a capital R) cannot save us, as its secular worshippers thought it could.
- Knowing and serving Jesus Christ the Redeemer and his Father, who through Christ is now our Father, is the only thing that gives life meaning.
- "Human life has always been lived on the edge of a precipice" (Lewis), sometimes with danger to the body and always with danger to the spirit.
- Death is inescapable and wisdom requires us to remember this and live our lives accordingly.
- While God protects his people against spiritual shipwreck, he often puts them through pain for their spiritual progress and sometimes permits and uses war to that end.
- Christians are called not to understand everything God is doing but to be faithful to him.

All of this, to be sure, is mere mainstream Christianity, but it is worth underlining that Chambers the Baptist and Lewis the Anglican were at one in stressing it all.

Third, we must think directly about war. "War is the most damnably bad thing," Chambers said in Egypt three months before his death. "Because God overrules a thing and brings good out of it does not mean that the thing itself is a good thing... [However,] if the war has made me reconcile myself with the fact that there is sin in human beings, I shall no longer go with my head in the clouds, or buried in the sand like an ostrich, but I shall be wishing to face facts as they are." And that will be a good thing, for "it is not being reconciled to the fact of sin that produces all the disasters in life."

Lewis' Screwtape knows this to be true. He tells Wormwood not to hope for too much from the war, for it will not destroy the faith of real believers and will under God produce a measure of realism about life, death, and the issues of eternity that was not there before. "One of our best

weapons, contented worldliness, is rendered useless," moaned Screwtape. "In wartime not even a human can believe that he is going to live forever."

"War," said Lewis the preacher, "makes death real to us; and that would have been regarded as one of its blessings by most of the great Christians of the past." Then he told his audience of undergraduates that they were at Oxford to study, that the values of being educated were not affected by the fact of war, and so they should get on with their academic work. Thus they would glorify God. For trusting God for the future, and attending to present daily duties and tasks, is the way to honour God in wartime, as at all other times.

Lewis sharply denies that the experience of war in any form changes everything, as some have been saying that September 11 did. Writing half a century ago of nuclear war, he risked sounding unfeeling in order to enforce the way of wisdom:

**When you fear
God, you fear nothing
else... if you do not
fear God, you fear
everything else.**

Believe me, dear sir or madam, you and all whom you love were already sentenced to death before the atomic bomb was invented; and quite a high percentage of us were going to die in unpleasant ways... It is perfectly ridiculous to go about whimpering and drawing long faces because the scientists have added one more chance of painful and premature death to a world which already bristled with such chances and in which death itself was not a chance but a certainty... Let that bomb when it comes find us doing sensible and human things—praying, working, teaching, listening to music, bathing the children, playing tennis, chatting to our friends over a pint and a game of darts—not huddled together like frightened sheep and thinking about bombs. They may break our bodies (any microbe can do that) but they need not dominate our minds.

In other words, despite the threat of war,

let life—God-given life—go on.

What then of America's present fears—of more targeted destructions and random explosions, of germ and chemical warfare, and of other science-fiction fantasies becoming grim fact? Many feel panic at this moment, and it is clear, I think, what our teachers would have said to us had they foreseen such things.

Here is Chambers on fear:

It is the most natural thing in the world to be scared, and the clearest evidence that God's grace is at work in our hearts is when we do not get into panics... The remarkable thing about fearing God is that when you fear God you fear nothing else, whereas if you do not fear God you fear everything else.

And Lewis wrote:

You needn't worry about not feeling brave. Our Lord didn't—see the scene in Gethsemane. How thankful I am that when God became man he did not choose to become a man of iron nerves... Especially don't worry about being brave over merely possible evils in the future... If and when a horror turns up you will then be given Grace to help you. I don't think one is usually given it in advance. "Give us our daily bread" (not an annuity for life) applies to spiritual gifts too; the little daily support for the daily trial. Life has to be taken day by day and hour by hour.

In light of all this, I guess that Chambers and Lewis, were they back with us, would direct us as follows: Accept tightened security. Take all precautions that are responsibly certified as reasonable and desirable. While keeping watch and being careful, always remember that God is in charge and Romans 8:28 is true—he is working for the good of all those who love him. And, finally, pray for courage to cope with whatever comes, in the confidence that Isaac Watts was right when he wrote:

Should all the hosts of death
And powers of hell unknown
Put their most dreadful forms
Of rage and malice on,
I shall be safe, for Christ displays
Superior power and guardian grace.

Here, surely, is the wisdom and comfort we all need today.

J.I. Packer is an executive editor of Christianity Today, Board of Governors professor of theology at Regent College in Vancouver, and General Editor of the new English Standard Version Bible from Crossway Books.

Copyright © 2002 Christianity Today. January 7, 2002

AGGRESSIVE LOVE

PERSECUTION IS COMING TO AMERICA, JOSEF TSON TELLS SEMINARY STUDENTS

CHRISTIANS in America will face great persecution soon and they must be aggressors in the midst of it, Josef Tson said March 2 at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.

"This [persecution] is the new phenomenon that has arrived and it is going to increase," said Tson, president of the Romanian Missionary Society. "But we are the aggressors. God faced evil by sending his Son as the answer to it. Jesus came with three things: truth, love and self-sacrifice. When you are slaughtered, you win the battle ... and you win with these things."

The persecution actually began in the early 1960s, Tson said, when all vestiges of Christianity were jettisoned from public schools in the United States. At the same time, the media grew hostile to the Christian faith, which spurred the rise of post-modernism in both the country's culture and universities, he said.

As a result, America has lost any notion of absolute truth and has substituted sentimentality and political correctness as a yardstick for morality, he said.

"The only crime now is the crime of intolerance done by evangelical Christians," Tson said. "The most scary thing [is] the new concept of hate crimes."

"When Southern Baptists decided to continue to evangelise the Jews and the Hindus, that was called a hate crime. Don't

you see you have all the elements of a climate of persecution of the Christians in America? Like every other such event, it has the likelihood of snowballing."

Tson has been president of the Romanian Missionary Society since 1982 and is pastor of the Baptist Church in Brasov in his native Romania. He was exiled from Romania in 1981 under intense persecution.

He spent several years ministering in the United States before returning to his newly liberated homeland in 1991. He has since founded the Oradea Bible Institute (now known as Emmanuel Bible Institute), built a Christian publishing company and established the Christian Radio Voice of the Gospel.

In October 1974, Tson was arrested and imprisoned in Romania for being a Christian minister. Charged with "propaganda which endangers the security of the state," Tson was subjected to weekly interrogation and mind games. It was in this climate that he began to understand the "theology of martyrdom," which later became the subject of a scholarly paper and book. From a practical standpoint, **Tson said his imprisonment helped him form a clearer view of the biblical response to persecution.**

"When the secret police officer threatened to shoot me, I smiled and I said, 'Sir, don't you understand that when you kill me you send me to glory? You cannot threaten me with glory.' He looked at me and said, 'Look, when

I threaten to shoot [you] or kill [you] at least get scared. ...You are not normal.'

"I'm not normal," Tson continued. "I am not natural—I am supernatural—because I know that **my life is only training for glory**. The more suffering, the more troubles, the greater the glory. So, why say, 'Stop this trouble?' Because the more of them the greater the glory up there."

"If you look at things like that," Tson told his seminary audience, "you have the courage to stand the coming persecution in America."

Tson outlined **four sources of his courage**, which buoyed him during his imprisonment. He urged students to apply them to the imminent conflicts they will face in an increasingly pagan American culture: **develop the mind of Christ; understand the sovereignty of God; realise that love, not evil, is the aggressor; and understand that suffering produces glory.**

Christians under persecution should realise that God is absolutely sovereign and in control of all the affairs of his people, Tson said.

"When I was in prison it was like seeing my God moving his six puppet strings," he said, referring to the six guards charged with his interrogation. "That's understanding sovereignty. Look to them [persecutions] as God's puppet strings for you. They are his instruments for you."

—JEFF ROBINSON

· REST IN HIM ·

"He has created us through our union with Christ Jesus for doing good deeds which He beforehand planned for us to do" (Ephesians 2:10, Wms.)

The turning point in our Christian life comes when we begin to "let God be God," the day we throw all caution (fear) to the winds and look to Him to carry out His purpose for us in His own time and way.

Our Father never does a thing suddenly: He has always prepared long, long before. So there is nothing to murmur about, nothing to be proud of, in the calling of God. There is also no one of whom to be jealous, for other people's advantages have nothing to do with us. "It is not of him that

willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that hath mercy" (Romans 9:16). Our heritage, our birth, our natural equipment: these are things already determined by God. We may pick up other things in the way, for we are always learning; but the way is His way. When we look back over our life, we bow and acknowledge that all was prepared of God. To have such an attitude of heart, that is true rest.

Let us take care lest we get out of soul-rest in seeking further blessing. God cannot work whilst we are anxious, even about our spiritual advance. Let us take Him at His Word, and leave the fulfillment of it to Him.

"For it is God Himself whose power creates within you the desire to do His gracious will and also brings about the accomplishment of the desire" (Philippians 2:13, Weymouth).

MILES J. STANFORD

A HELPFUL MEDITATION

My success at treating the weakest members of society with love and compassion is a divine indicator of my allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ.