

READING AND DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR

The Weight of Glory

by

C. S. Lewis

The Weight of Glory is a series of essays and talks that Lewis wrote over a long period (roughly between 1939 and 1956). We have organized this guide so that the questions correspond to each essay. This allows individuals and groups to read through the book as a whole or choose certain essays to examine more closely.

INTRODUCTION

1. What is your sense of *The Weight of Glory* as a collection of essays? Are there common threads running through the essays, though each stands on its own?
2. C. S. Lewis gave each piece as a talk to an audience in the mid-twentieth century. Do you think the writings work as talks in ways that may not translate to the page? Or vice versa?

CHAPTER 1 THE WEIGHT OF GLORY

1. Have you thought of heaven as a bribe—that if you follow Christ it will pay off with everlasting bliss? Lewis says that as we follow Jesus, we understand that it's not a bribe but a desire for heaven itself (p. 28). How has your attitude toward heaven changed through the years?
2. “If Christianity could tell me no more of the far-off land than my own temperament led me to surmise already, then Christianity would be no higher than myself. If it has more to give me, I expect it to be less immediately attractive than ‘my own stuff’” (pp. 33–34). Do you struggle with the lack of information that scripture provides about heaven?
3. There are five things we know of heaven: we will be with Christ, be like him, have glory, enjoy a feast, and have some sort of role to play. Lewis asks, “Why any one of them except the first? Can anything be added to the conception of being with Christ?” (p. 34). What do you think? How would you answer Lewis's question?
4. Jesus says we need to be like little children to enter the kingdom of heaven. A little child seeks the praise of his father as the Christian seeks the praise of God. We want to be told, “Well done, faithful servant.” Lewis struggles with this idea. He calls it the weight of glory, “to be loved by God, not merely pitied” (p. 39). Have you struggled with this simple truth? How does Lewis's

definition of glory line up with what you understand the meaning of glory to be?

5. “You have never talked to a mere mortal,” Lewis writes. “It is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit—immortal horrors or everlasting splendours” (p. 46). Does that statement make you think differently about what it means to interact with others and, particularly, what it means to love your neighbor?

CHAPTER 2 LEARNING IN WAR-TIME

1. Lewis asks a question that he thinks we must continually answer: “How can you be so frivolous and selfish as to think about anything but the salvation of souls?” Why do you think we busy ourselves with theorems and arguments and the latest writings, as Lewis says (pp. 50–51)? Is it wrong to occupy our time with tasks that don’t further God’s kingdom?
2. What does Lewis mean when he says that “Christianity doesn’t simply replace our natural life. . . . [I]t is rather a new organisation which exploits, to its own supernatural ends, these natural materials” (p. 54)? How have you struggled with this paradox: that we experience the seemingly “frivolous” activities of life along with the call to do everything for the glory of God?

CHAPTER 3 WHY I AM NOT A PACIFIST

1. At the beginning of the chapter, Lewis says that the decision to fight or walk away actually asks a more general question: “How do we decide what is good or evil?” Do you think Lewis sufficiently answers this question in the chapter?
2. Lewis gives his rationale for why he is not a pacifist. He says there are some people who are so corrupted that they do not love or want happiness but prefer hatred and misery (p. 69). He certainly doesn’t claim that violence is agreeable, but for Lewis, one cannot say that war always does more harm than good (pp. 72–73). Rather, he works through judgment, intuition, history, and authority to qualify what turning the cheek really means for an individual and for a nation (pp. 84–90). Do you agree with Lewis’s rationale? How does your understanding of the Bible and Christian faith influence your feelings toward war?

CHAPTER 4 TRANSPOSITION

1. There are moments, as Lewis references in the first chapter, when we glimpse the glory of God—in nature, in our relationships with people, or in church participation. In these moments, we might be briefly transposed to see beyond what we might otherwise see. But

often we shy away. Have you dared to be a person who is sensitive to the work of God, as Lewis discusses in this chapter? Are there any examples of these “transposed” moments in your life?

CHAPTER 5 IS THEOLOGY POETRY?

1. Does Christian theology owe its attraction to its power of arousing and satisfying our imaginations (p. 117)? Lewis points to the necessity of imagination as a tool we use in faith, but the mythology is not the goal. How has imagination helped you solidify the truth of your faith?

CHAPTER 6 THE INNER RING

1. “Of all passions the passion for the Inner Ring is most skillful in making a man who is not yet a very bad man do very bad things” (p. 154). Do you agree or disagree? How can this be avoided?
2. What is the problem with an “Inner Ring,” as Lewis calls it—a group that includes some people while excluding others—especially in relation to faith and scripture, which tells us, “Seek and find; ask and it’ll be opened” (p. 157)?

CHAPTER 7 MEMBERSHIP

1. Scripture says that the church is the bride of Christ. Lewis says that means we are members of one another (p. 158), thus pointing to the inadequacy of a private religious life. What are your struggles with being involved in a church community? Do you agree with Lewis's interpretation of this communal necessity?
2. Lewis says, "The very word *membership* is of a Christian origin, but it has been taken over by the world and emptied of meaning. . . . By *members* [Paul] meant what we should call *organs*, things essentially different from, and complementary to, one another" (pp. 163–64). How is this different from the popular idea of membership, and how should a church reflect this stronger definition in its community?
3. How does Lewis reanalyze the idea that we are all equal in the eyes of God (p. 167)? Do you agree with him?

CHAPTER 8 ON FORGIVENESS

1. Do you believe in the forgiveness of sins (p. 177)? Lewis felt this question had a simple answer for the Christian, but he soon realized that "to believe in the forgiveness of sins is not nearly so easy as I thought." Why not? Do you agree?

2. When you ask God to forgive you, are you sometimes asking God to excuse you (p. 178)?
3. Do you find it hard to forgive the “incessant provocations of daily life”? Lewis defines it as continuing to forgive “the bossy mother-in-law, the bullying husband, the nagging wife, the selfish daughter, the deceitful son” (p. 182). Does it help to remember that we ourselves stand in need of grace?

CHAPTER 9 A SLIP OF THE TONGUE

1. When you enter into daily prayer or attend church services, do you sometimes experience what Lewis describes as the voice inside you that says not to get too close in case you’re asked to do something quite inconvenient (p. 185)? How does understanding the “weight of glory” and what it means to be loved by God alter our expectations that he will move and change us?