

*If I Had*  
**LUNCH**  
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**C. S. LEWIS**



*Exploring the Ideas  
of C. S. Lewis on  
the Meaning of Life*

**ALISTER  
McGRATH**

APPENDIX I

## For Further Reading

The best biographies of Lewis are the following:

- Jacobs, Alan. *The Narnian: The Life and Imagination of C. S. Lewis*. New York: HarperCollins, 2005.
- McGrath, Alister E. *C. S. Lewis—A Life: Eccentric Genius, Reluctant Prophet*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2013.
- Sayer, George. *Jack: A Life of C. S. Lewis*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005.

Works about Lewis that are relevant to this book follow:

- Aeschliman, Michael D. *The Restitution of Man: C. S. Lewis and the Case against Scientism*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998.
- Carnell, Corbin Scott. *Bright Shadow of Reality: Spiritual Longing in C. S. Lewis*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999.
- Carpenter, Humphrey. *The Inklings: C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien, Charles Williams, and Their Friends*. London: Allen & Unwin, 1981.
- Downing, David C. *Into the Wardrobe: C. S. Lewis and the Narnia Chronicles*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005.
- Duriez, Colin. *Tolkien and C. S. Lewis: The Gift of Friendship*. Mahwah, NJ: HiddenSpring, 2003.
- Glyer, Diana. *The Company They Keep: C. S. Lewis and J. R. R.*

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- Tolkien as Writers in Community*. Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2007.
- Heck, Joel D. *Irrigating Deserts: C. S. Lewis on Education*. St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 2005.
- Hooper, Walter. *C. S. Lewis: The Companion and Guide*. London: HarperCollins, 2005.
- MacSwain, Robert, and Michael Ward, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to C. S. Lewis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- Markos, Louis. *On the Shoulders of Hobbits: The Road to Virtue with Tolkien and Lewis*. Chicago: Moody, 2012.
- McGrath, Alister E. *The Intellectual World of C. S. Lewis*. Oxford and Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013.
- Meilander, Gilbert. *The Taste for the Other: The Social and Ethical Thought of C. S. Lewis*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998.
- Nicholi, Armand M. *The Question of God: C. S. Lewis and Sigmund Freud Debate God, Love, Sex, and the Meaning of Life*. New York: Free Press, 2002.
- Ward, Michael. *Planet Narnia: The Seven Heavens in the Imagination of C. S. Lewis*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Williams, Rowan D. *The Lion's World: A Journey into the Heart of Narnia*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.

### Editions of works by Lewis referenced in this work follow:

- The Abolition of Man*. New York: HarperCollins, 2001.
- The Allegory of Love*. London: Oxford University Press, 1935.
- The Chronicles of Narnia. 7 vols. London: HarperCollins, 2002.
- The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis*. Edited by Walter Hooper. 3 vols. San Francisco: HarperOne, 2004–2006.
- The Discarded Image*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
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- An Experiment in Criticism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
- The Four Loves*. London: HarperCollins, 2002.

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*A Grief Observed*. New York: HarperCollins, 1994. [Originally published under the pseudonym N. W. Clerk]  
*Mere Christianity*. London: HarperCollins, 2002.  
*Miracles*. London: HarperCollins, 2002.  
*The Problem of Pain*. London: HarperCollins, 2002.  
*Surprised by Joy*. London: HarperCollins, 2002.

CHAPTER 1: THE GRAND PANORAMA: C. S. LEWIS ON  
THE MEANING OF LIFE

Lewis sets out the ability of Christianity to make sense of things at several points in his works. The best starting point is *Mere Christianity*, especially Book 1, chapters 1–4, and Book 3, chapter 10.

The essay “Is Theology Poetry?” repays study:

“Is Theology Poetry?” in *Essay Collection and Other Short Pieces*,  
Lesley Walmsley, ed. London: HarperCollins, 2000, 10–21.

For a discussion of how Lewis came to discover Christianity, see the following:

Downing, David C. *The Most Reluctant Convert: C. S. Lewis's Journey to Faith*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002.  
McGrath, Alister E. *C. S. Lewis—A Life: Eccentric Genius, Reluctant Prophet*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2013, 131–59.

CHAPTER 2: “OLD FRIENDS TO TRUST”: C. S. LEWIS ON  
FRIENDSHIP

Lewis's most extended discussion of friendship is found in the fourth chapter of *The Four Loves*.

For the best study of the Inklings, see the following:

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Carpenter, Humphrey. *The Inklings: C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien, Charles Williams, and Their Friends*. London: Allen & Unwin, 1978.

For the way in which the Inklings worked, see the following:

Glyer, Diana. *The Company They Keep: C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien as Writers in Community*. Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2007.

For reflections on the significance of the friendship between Lewis and Tolkien, see the following:

Duriez, Colin. *Tolkien and C. S. Lewis: The Gift of Friendship*. Mahwah, NJ: HiddenSpring, 2003.

Jacobs, Alan. "The End of Friendship." In *Wayfaring: Essays Pleasant and Unpleasant*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010, 128–36.

For an assessment of Lewis's approach to friendship and love, see the following:

Leiva-Merikakis, Erasmo. *Love's Sacred Order: The Four Loves Revisited*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000.

## CHAPTER 3: A STORY-SHAPED WORLD: C. S. LEWIS ON NARNIA AND THE IMPORTANCE OF STORIES

To get the most out of this chapter, you should read the following books:

*The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*  
*The Voyage of the "Dawn Treader"*

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On the writing and themes of Narnia, see the following:

- Brown, Devon. *Inside Narnia: A Guide to Exploring "The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe."* Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2005.
- Downing, David C. *Into the Wardrobe: C. S. Lewis and the Narnia Chronicles.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005.
- Jacobs, Alan. *The Narnian: The Life and Imagination of C. S. Lewis.* New York: HarperCollins, 2005.
- Williams, Rowan D. *The Lion's World: A Journey into the Heart of Narnia.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2012.

**CHAPTER 4: THE LORD AND THE LION: C. S. LEWIS ON  
ASLAN AND THE CHRISTIAN LIFE**

To get the most out of this chapter, you should read the following books (in this order):

- The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*  
*The Magician's Nephew*  
*The Last Battle*

Other works that you may find helpful are the following:

- Alexander, Joy. "The Whole Art and Joy of Words': Aslan's Speech in the Chronicles of Narnia." *Mythlore* 91 (2003): 37–48.
- Hauerwas, Stanley. "Aslan and the New Morality." *Religious Education* 67, no. 6 (1972): 419–29.
- Markos, Louis. *On the Shoulders of Hobbits: The Road to Virtue with Tolkien and Lewis.* Chicago: Moody, 2012.
- Williams, Rowan D. *The Lion's World: A Journey into the Heart of Narnia.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2013, 49–111.

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### CHAPTER 5: TALKING ABOUT FAITH: C. S. LEWIS ON THE ART OF APOLOGETICS

Lewis's best apologetic work is *Mere Christianity*, which is an edited version of his Broadcast Talks given for the British Broadcasting Corporation during the Second World War. I especially recommend that you read its first five chapters, which set out Lewis's version of the "argument from morality."

On Lewis's approach to apologetics, see the following:

- McGrath, Alister E. "Reason, Experience, and Imagination: Lewis's Apologetic Method." In *The Intellectual World of C. S. Lewis*, Oxford and Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013, 129–46.
- Walsh, Chad. *C. S. Lewis: Apostle to the Skeptics*. New York: Macmillan, 1949. This is a classic study, which first introduced many Americans to Lewis, and is still valuable.
- Ward, Michael. "The Good Serves the Better and Both the Best: C. S. Lewis on Imagination and Reason in Apologetics." In *Imaginative Apologetics: Theology, Philosophy, and the Catholic Tradition*, edited by Andrew Davison. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012, 59–78.

Lewis has had a very significant impact on recent Christian apologetics, as can be seen from the following works:

- McGrath, Alister E. *Mere Apologetics: How to Help Seekers and Skeptics Find Faith*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012.
- Sire, James W. *A Little Primer on Humble Apologetics*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006.
- Wright, N. T. *Simply Christian: Why Christianity Makes Sense*. San Francisco: HarperOne, 2010.

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CHAPTER 6: A LOVE OF LEARNING: C. S. LEWIS ON  
EDUCATION

Lewis's views on the shortcomings of modern education are set out particularly clearly in *The Abolition of Man*, especially its first chapter.

His essay "On the Reading of Old Books" is a classic, and well worth reading. See *Essay Collection and Other Short Pieces*. Edited by Lesley Walmsley, London: HarperCollins, 2000, pages 438–43.

For Lewis's career as an educationalist, see the following:

McGrath, Alister E. *C. S. Lewis—A Life: Eccentric Genius, Reluctant Prophet*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2013, 161–90.

For Lewis's views on education and their contemporary relevance, see the following:

Heck, Joel D. *Irrigating Deserts: C. S. Lewis on Education*. St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 2005.

CHAPTER 7: COPING WITH SUFFERING: C. S. LEWIS ON  
THE PROBLEM OF PAIN

Lewis's views on pain and suffering are best studied from these two works:

*The Problem of Pain*  
*A Grief Observed*

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### Other works that you may find helpful:

- Keller, Timothy. *Walking with God through Pain and Suffering*. New York: Dutton, 2013.
- McGrath, Alister E. "The Cross, Suffering, and Theological Bewilderment: Reflections on Martin Luther and C. S. Lewis." In *The Passionate Intellect: Christian Faith and the Discipleship of the Mind*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010, 57–69.
- Root, Jerry. *C. S. Lewis and a Problem of Evil*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2009.
- Ward, Michael. "On Suffering." In *The Cambridge Companion to C. S. Lewis*. Edited by Robert MacSwain and Michael Ward. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, 203–19.

### CHAPTER 8: "FURTHER UP AND FURTHER IN": C. S. LEWIS ON HOPE AND HEAVEN

For Lewis's views on heaven and the Christian hope, you should read the following:

- Mere Christianity*, book 3, chapter 10.
- Miracles*, chapter 16.
- "The Weight of Glory." In *Essay Collection and Other Short Pieces*. Edited by Lesley Walmsley. London: HarperCollins, 2000, 96–106.

Other works that you may find helpful are the following:

- Connolly, Sean. *Inklings of Heaven: C. S. Lewis and Eschatology*. Leominster, Herefordshire: Gracewing, 2007.
- Edwards, Michael. "C. S. Lewis: Imagining Heaven." In *Literature and Theology* 6, (1992): 107–24.
- Urang, Gunnar. *Shadows of Heaven: Religion and Fantasy in the Writing of C. S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and J. R. R. Tolkien*. Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1971.
- Willis, John Randolph. *Pleasures Forevermore: The Theology of C. S. Lewis*. Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1983.

## Introducing Lewis

“JUST WHO IS C. S. Lewis?” I asked one of my schoolmates at my high school in Belfast back in the late 1960s. Our headmaster had mentioned how much he had enjoyed reading one of Lewis’s books, which had something to do with a lion and a wardrobe. It seemed an improbable plotline, and I wondered what on earth it was all about. It was not the most promising introduction to Lewis, and my momentary interest in him went no further. I was too preoccupied with studying science to worry much about lions or wardrobes.

At that stage, I was a rather ungracious and aggressive sixteen-year-old atheist, who took the view that science had long since eliminated belief in God. It was, therefore, something of a surprise when I found my intellectual world turned inside out only a few years later. I had gone up to Oxford University to study science in much greater detail,

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assuming it would confirm my atheism. After much mental anguish, I realised that Christianity made far more sense than atheism. Much to my embarrassment, I became one of a group of people whom I had, until this point, totally despised—serious religious believers.

As I began to think about my faith, friends suggested I should read C. S. Lewis. Curious, I bought a few of his books in 1974, and scribbled the date of purchase on their title pages. They have remained with me ever since. It's hard to put into words what I found in Lewis then, and continue to find to this day. Somehow, he seemed to present Christianity in a way that satisfied my intellectual longings, and stimulated my imagination. It wasn't just that he said some good things; he also seemed to say them rather well.

Forty years later, I still read Lewis. Indeed, I keep coming back to him, finding many things I missed the first time round. There always seemed to be added layers of meaning waiting to be discovered, good images to be used in sermons, or elegant turns of phrase to be considered and savoured. I am hardly alone in this evaluation. Lewis has become one of the most widely read religious writers of the twentieth century.

So who was C. S. Lewis?<sup>1</sup> Clive Staples Lewis was born in the Irish city of Belfast on November 29,

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1898. His father was a successful lawyer, who was doing well enough to allow the family to move to a large house (affectionately known as “Little Lea”) on the outskirts of Belfast in 1905. By the time Lewis had settled into this new house, he asked his family to call him “Jack.” Nobody really knows why. Lewis and his older brother, Warnie, spent hours alone in the vast attic of the old house, inhabiting imaginary worlds of their own making. There were, Lewis recalled, books everywhere in the house. Both his father and mother read widely, and Lewis was free to roam and read as he pleased. When Warnie left home to go to school in England, Lewis took to reading on his own, developing a vivid sense of imagination and longing.

While waiting for Warnie to come home from school during vacations, Lewis used his imagination to create new worlds. From the windows of Little Lea, the young Lewis could see the distant Castlereagh Hills. These far-off hills seemed to symbolise something that lay beyond his reach. A sense of intense longing arose as he contemplated them. Although Lewis could not say exactly *what* he longed for, the mysterious hills seemed to heighten his yearning rather than satisfy it.

Yet tragedy was about to strike the Lewis family. Lewis’s mother, Flora, died of cancer in August 1908, ending the security of his childhood. As he

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later recalled, “It was sea and islands now; the great continent had sunk like Atlantis.”<sup>2</sup> Albert Lewis decided it would be best if his younger son went to boarding schools in England—Wynyard School, Watford; then Cherbourg School, Malvern; and finally Malvern College. None of these worked out well. Lewis became deeply unhappy, unable to cope with the pressures of school life. Eventually, Albert Lewis realised that things were not working out for his younger son. He would have to do something about it.

In the end, Albert Lewis hit on a brilliant solution. Warnie had set his heart on a military career in the British army. But there was a problem. Warnie had been thrown out of his high school for smoking. His father realised he would have to provide some private tuition to make sure his son passed the entrance examinations for the army. And he knew whom he wanted to teach him.

William T. Kirkpatrick, Albert Lewis’s former headmaster, had gained a formidable reputation as an educationalist in Ireland. By this time Kirkpatrick had retired, and had time on his hands. Albert Lewis asked him if he would tutor Warnie. This worked so well that Warnie ended up in the top 10 per cent of candidates in the entrance examinations for the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst, Britain’s

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premier institution for the training of future army officers.

When it became painfully obvious that his younger son wasn't coping with school, Albert Lewis asked Kirkpatrick to tutor his younger son as well. He knew he was taking a risk. But it soon became clear that he had hit on a brilliant solution. Lewis was sent to study with Kirkpatrick, who then lived in the southern English county of Surrey. Lewis flourished in his new environment. Kirkpatrick was able to give him the close personal attention that he needed. Kirkpatrick introduced Lewis to the Oxford tutorial model, forcing him to develop and defend his views. Thanks to Kirkpatrick's teaching methods, Lewis won a scholarship to University College, Oxford, to study classics in December 1916. It was an outstanding achievement.

By this time, Lewis had become a hardened atheist. His letters of this period make it clear that this was not an adolescent reaction against the faith of his parents, but a considered rejection of belief in God based on arguments that he believed to be unanswerable. No thinking person, he asserted, could seriously believe in God. Lewis's dogmatic atheism caused concern to his closest friend, Arthur Greeves, a committed Christian. Lewis later recalled that he "bombarded" Greeves with "all the thin artillery of a seventeen year old rationalist."<sup>3</sup> In the end, the

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differences between Greeves and Lewis on this matter were so great that they simply agreed no longer to discuss the matter in their letters.

In August 1914, the First World War broke out. By the time Lewis won a place at Oxford University, the “Great War” (as it was known at the time) was in its third year. Lewis realised that it was inevitable that he would have to go to war. Lewis volunteered to enlist in the British army, rather than wait to be conscripted.

Lewis was demobilised in December 1918, and resumed his studies at University College, Oxford, in January 1919. He began by studying classics. Oxford quickly realised that Lewis was a brilliant student. He was awarded First Class Honours in classical moderations (the first part of Oxford’s classics course) in 1920, and First Class Honours in *Literae Humaniores* (a Latin phrase meaning “humane letters,” the second part of the course) in 1922. On realising that he needed to widen his academic competency in order to secure a teaching position, Lewis spent the next year gaining First Class Honours in English Language and Literature, cramming two years of studies into a single year. Lewis had gained what Oxford called a “triple first”—a highly distinguished academic accolade.

But there was no job for him at the end of his studies. Lewis managed to get a temporary lectureship in

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philosophy at University College for the academic year 1923–24. Finally, he was appointed to a tutorial fellowship in English Language and Literature at Magdalen College, Oxford, in 1925. Lewis now became a member of the Oxford University Faculty of English Language and Literature, where he developed a growing friendship with J. R. R. Tolkien, playing a key role in encouraging Tolkien to complete and publish the classic work now known as *The Lord of the Rings*.

Although Lewis was still an atheist when he took up his fellowship at Magdalen College in 1925, he was clearly in the process of questioning his dogmatic godlessness. Lewis increasingly came to find a godless world uninteresting and unpersuasive. His reading of English literature persuaded him that believing in God was far more interesting and persuasive than atheism. He wrote in his autobiography, “A young man who wishes to remain a sound Atheist cannot be too careful of his reading. There are traps everywhere.”<sup>4</sup> In the end, Lewis found himself overwhelmed by his growing realisation of the reality of God, becoming “the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England.”<sup>5</sup>

Lewis now believed in God. Yet there was a second phase to his conversion, which began in September 1931. At this time Lewis was moving

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from a generalised belief in God to a specific commitment to Christianity.

Lewis's conversion to Christianity—which he later described in *Surprised by Joy* (1955)—initially had little impact on his academic career. His first academic book, *The Allegory of Love* (1936), had been well received, winning the Sir Israel Gollancz Memorial Prize in 1937. The publication of this work marked the beginning of his inexorable rise to academic fame, sealed with his magisterial *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century* (1954) and his election as a Fellow of the British Academy. Other academic landmarks along the way included the 1941 Ballard Matthews Lectures at University College, Bangor (published as *A Preface to "Paradise Lost"*); the 1943 Riddell Memorial Lectures (published as *The Abolition of Man*); and his election as a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in 1948.

Yet these heavyweight academic works—though widely read and respected in their time—are not the reason that Lewis is remembered today. Alongside his scholarly writings, Lewis wrote books of a very different nature. Aiming at clarity and conviction, Lewis produced a series of works to communicate the reasonableness of Christianity to his own generation. He had once been an atheist himself. So why not try to explain and commend his new faith to those who had yet to discover God? These works brought him

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popular acclaim, but seemed to some to destroy his scholarly reputation. In the late 1940s, Lewis was passed over for a series of senior academic appointments at Oxford, including the Merton professorship of English Literature.

Lewis's first popular book, *The Pilgrim's Regress* (1933), was based loosely on John Bunyan's classic *The Pilgrim's Progress*. It was not a success. Nevertheless, Lewis continued to write at a popular level. *The Problem of Pain*, which appeared in 1940, was well received. On the basis of its clarity and intelligence of argument, Lewis was invited by the British Broadcasting Corporation to give a series of radio talks about Christianity. These were so successful that he gave three more series of talks, which were brought together in the classic work *Mere Christianity* (1952). In 1942, Lewis published *The Screwtape Letters*, whose wit and insight firmly established Lewis's reputation as a leading defender of the Christian faith, especially in the United States.

That reputation was consolidated by further works, including *The Great Divorce* (1945) and *Miracles* (1947). Outspokenly critical of "Christianity-and-water" (as he dubbed liberal versions of Christianity), he struck a deep chord of sympathy with his readers. His critics were furious. The British journalist Alistair Cooke, for example, described him as a "very unremarkable minor prophet," who would soon be

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forgotten once the Second World War had ended. It was an unwise prediction, which merely showed that Cooke was himself a rather pompous and incompetent minor prophet.

Lewis's wartime fame might indeed have faded away had he not developed a quite unexpected line of writing, which took most of his close friends and family by surprise. In October 1950, the first of the seven Chronicles of Narnia appeared. *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* became a children's classic, showing Lewis's remarkable ability to engage the imagination, and use it to open up some of life's great questions—such as the existence of God and the doctrine of the Incarnation. Aslan, the great and noble lion of Narnia, became one of the most firmly established literary characters of the twentieth century.

By the time the final novel in the series—*The Last Battle*—was published in 1956, Lewis had left Oxford University. He had been elected as the first holder of the University of Cambridge's newly established Chair in Medieval and Renaissance English in 1954, and took up the position in January 1955. Although Lewis still lived in his Oxford home, The Kilns, on weekends, he now lived in Cambridge during the working week. After his move to Cambridge, Lewis wrote less explicitly apologetic material. He now preferred to supplement his academic writings with more popular works—such as *Reflections*

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*on the Psalms* (1958) and *The Four Loves* (1960)—exploring aspects of the Christian faith for the benefit of believers.

Shortly after assuming his new position at Cambridge, Lewis married Joy Davidman, an American divorcée, in a civil ceremony in Oxford in April 1956. It was later discovered that Davidman had cancer. The death of his wife in 1960 prompted Lewis to write, under a pseudonym, *A Grief Observed*, now often cited as one of the finest accounts of the grieving process.

By June 1963, it was clear that Lewis's own health was failing. Long-standing problems placed his heart under strain. Lewis's doctors told him that there was no way of remedying his situation. Lewis accepted the inevitable, resigning from his Cambridge chair and discussing the possibility of his death openly with his friends and correspondents. He died at his Oxford home in the early evening of November 22, 1963, just hours before President John F. Kennedy died from gunshot wounds in Dallas, Texas. Lewis is buried in the churchyard of Holy Trinity Church, Headington Quarry, Oxford.