Caught Off Guard: University Presbyterian Church – Wednesdays, October 1-29.
A Reading Guide for the Study of C.S. Lewis – The Man and Writer By Earl F. Palmer

C.S. Lewis is the Oxford Don who shared his faith and caught us off guard so that more than two generation of men and women, young and old have been encouraged in their own discoveries of Christian faith. This guide for study is designed to recommend a pathway of readings and possibilities for interpersonal dialogue and also individual inquiry into the life story and writings of C.S. Lewis.

I divide this guide into six parts:
1. Books by C.S. Lewis about himself
2. Letters of Lewis
3. Books by Lewis on various themes
4. Speeches of Lewis
5. Books about Lewis that endeavor to track his life story and his significance as a writer and Christian apologist
6. Media presentations that feature his life and work

(1) Books by Lewis about himself
The most important introduction to this journey is his 1955 autobiography Surprised by Joy (1955). Read also the tender book he wrote after the death of his wife, Joy, A Grief Observed (1961).

(2) The letters of C.S. Lewis
The Letters and his only personal diary, All My Road Before Me (1922-1927) gives to us a remarkable inside look into the way Lewis felt about life, friends, and his own faith journey. The most important resource is the collection edited by Walter Hooper, Letters of C.S. Lewis: Revised and Enlarged Edition (1966). Other letters that are helpful are Letters to an American Lady (1967); The Latin Letters (1968); Letters to Children (1985); and the Arthur Grieves letters, They Stand Together (1979).

(3) The major books by C.S. Lewis fall into groups:
   • Major technical studies in his scholarly field. (See the list in the Colin Duriez book, Tolkien and Lewis: A Gift of Friendship (2003).
   • Novels and Stories: See also the reference to the Duriez list above (publication dates from earliest to last provided in the list) including books, The Space Trilogy, The Chronicles of Narnia, and Till We Have Faces. Begin reading with The Chronicles of Narnia, however.
   • His books on making the Case for Christianity books begin with The Pilgrim’s Regress (1933). The next very important title is Problem of Pain (1940). Key books that help us to understand the theological perspectives and affirmations of Lewis are Screwtape Letters (1942); Miracles (1947); Mere Christianity (1952); and Letters to Malcolm Chiefly on Prayer (1964).

(4) The speeches of C.S. Lewis
These speeches offer a profound insight into his mind and heart. Note especially, Learning in Wartime (1939); Weight of Glory (1941); and De Descriptione Temporum, his inaugural lecture at Cambridge University, in which he gives his defense of what he called “old Western values.”
(5) **Books about C.S. Lewis are many.** I will list my favorite ones: The best overview of the two great men is in *Tolkien and C.S. Lewis The Gift of Friendship* (2003). I would add *The Inklings* by Humphrey Carpenter (1979); and *Jack* by George Sayer (1988). *C.S. Lewis: Companion and Guide* by Walter Hooper (1996) is the most complete overview of the man and the writer.

(6) **Media Resources** include films that are very useful in the study of Lewis and his influence on culture. See the three films of *The Chronicles of Narnia* and especially *The Lion, Witch and Wardrobe* with the outstanding additional bonus on Lewis, Tolkien, and Oxford. *Shadowlands* was both a major London and Broadway play and is available in both the BBC version and a U.S. film version. I prefer the latter. *Screwtape Letters* has been presented as a one man show with great success. *The Question of God: C.S. Lewis and Sigmund Freud* (2002) by Armand Nicholi, professor at Harvard University, inspired the play *Freud’s Last Session* that was a success Off Broadway. Taproot Theater here in Seattle offered a brilliant production of this play as well.

Here are some of my suggestions for discussion questions:

- Lewis was able to make friends. In your reading of his story, how would you describe the role that friends played in the faith journey of C.S. Lewis?
- Lewis read widely and he notes the influence of key writers and especially storytellers. Are you surprised by the kinds of writers who were influential in his thinking? Why did Lewis like George MacDonald?
- Lewis as a Christian answered every letter he received. What do you learn about Lewis through his letter writing?
- Lewis wrote to a schoolgirl, “Be sure you know the meaning of every word that you use.” What influence did his schoolmaster, Kirkpatrick, have that would lead Lewis to make this statement?
- Lewis wrote that he loved reading G.K. Chesterton because of his humor and because of his goodness. What can you learn from Lewis about the connection between humor and goodness? How does Lewis integrate the themes of humor and goodness into his writing?
- Lewis liked George Herbert because he felt that he “understood people.” Why do you think this model was important to Lewis as a writer himself? What examples can you give to illustrate the importance of “understanding people?”
- Lewis tells of the importance of his friend J.R.R. Tolkien in helping him to understand the meaning of Christ as the Lord who dies on our behalf. In what ways are Lewis and Tolkien soul mates in the faith?
- How might you describe how C.S. Lewis has affected your own life and faith journey?
- Which of Lewis’s books have meant the most to you? Why?