

Tessa Moore  
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Humanities IV

*THE SCREWTAPE LETTERS ORIGINAL ESSAY*

My dear Wormwood,

I am pleased to hear that your patient has begun to lose confidence. After a few days of wallowing in self-pity, she will most likely turn to popular methods of ‘self-care’ in order to gain ‘self-love’ (which are now synonyms for selfishness and pride, thanks to our skillful twisting).

You will start to witness a shift in your patient’s thought process. Instead of doing things that she knows will please the Enemy as well as herself, she will doubt her own instincts and look outward to see if her words, actions, and appearance measure up to the world’s standards and expectations. She will inevitably find that she does *not* measure up and never will, but instead of heeding the unappealing biblical call to remain set apart from the world, she will make herself open to any influences the media has to offer.

My firm hope is that your downtrodden patient will pick up on all the popular self-care health trends. In doing so, she (in her desperate state) will unhesitatingly obey the influencers’ demands to exercise every morning, to hydrate constantly, and to sleep the optimal amount for a sixteen year old. Although these things really are healthy and worthwhile, it is her motivation behind these habits that will lead her directly away from the Enemy. Rather than seeking to be healthy, fit, and beautiful in order to honor and serve Him better — which she would be doing if her mental state was unaffected — she seeks to feel accepted by people. She will end up in the delightful situation of doing the right things for the wrong reasons.

Such is the path of most young people in the world these days: they experience a rude awakening from the ignorance of childhood, realize that they are indeed different from each other, and decide that this is a bad thing. Thus, the love of simple pleasures, the development of personal preferences, and the desire for individualism are abolished. I believe that by following a few steps

you will soon have your patient joining the masses of indifferent, unvarying, uninteresting teenagers.

The first step has already been accomplished: bringing the matter of difference to the patient's attention. She is thoroughly aware of the fact that she doesn't quite know all the references, styles, or brands mentioned by her peers, and she thoroughly dislikes it. By comparing herself to others in dissatisfaction, she has taken her first tiptoe away from the Enemy.

The next step takes some technique, but produces wonderful results: through forgetfulness and procrastination, smother the girl's taste for simple pleasures. Have her ignore her mother's reminders to practice piano, have her decide that it's too late at night to read another chapter of Jane Austen, have her groan and walk away when her brother asks for a batch of cookies or help with homework — because these are all activities from which the girl derives pure, untainted, wholesome joy. This disgusting joy is toxic to our mission and therefore we must put an end to any joy-inducing activities. Not only must she brush off her favorite hobbies, but she must also learn to suppress and ignore any talents that are literally God-given and would aid in His service. Thus, she will lose much of her true personality and her identity as a working part of the church body.

If the patient's conscience is ever pricked as she thinks fondly of her old amusements and employments, you must immediately turn to the third step which I mentioned previously — procrastination. For this particular patient, you needn't focus on short-term procrastination, as she is very organized and does things promptly as long as she thinks them important. Rather, you must have her put off habits and tasks until that still-hazy period of adulthood. Her reasoning should be, "I have plenty of time to learn piano, if I decide I need it for my career," or "I'll read the classics when I'm old and can't do anything else," or "I'll bond with my siblings when we're all mature and out of the house". Presently, you will find that your patient is dissatisfied, selfish, indistinct, and ambitionless.

This is a major turning point for you, Wormwood. Right now your patient is at the peak of vulnerability — she does not know who she is, much less who she is supposed to be. It is your job to feed her advice, ideas, and plenty of lies, so that any progress she has made into Enemy territory will be lost and forgotten. These are precious moments for a demon. Use them well.

Your affectionate uncle,

Screwtape