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An Introduction to C.S. Lewis's First and Second Things: Navigating the Spiritual Landscape

C.S. Lewis, the celebrated author and theologian, gifted the world with profound insights into the Christian faith and the human condition. Among his most influential works, the concepts of "First Things" and "Second Things" offer a powerful framework for understanding spiritual growth and the true nature of happiness. This article delves deep into Lewis's exploration of these foundational ideas, examining what constitutes the First Things and how our pursuit of them shapes our lives. We will explore how understanding the distinction between First and Second Things is crucial for avoiding common pitfalls in faith and life. Furthermore, we will unpack the practical implications of prioritizing the First Things, drawing upon Lewis's characteristic blend of logic and imagination. Join us as we navigate the spiritual landscape as illuminated by C.S. Lewis's timeless wisdom.

- Understanding C.S. Lewis's First and Second Things
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Decoding C.S. Lewis's First and Second Things: A Spiritual Framework

C.S. Lewis, a formidable intellect and a deeply sensitive observer of the human spirit, introduced the concept of "First Things" and "Second Things" as a vital lens through which to view our desires, our pursuits, and ultimately, our eternal destiny. This conceptual divide is not merely an academic exercise; it is a practical guide for living a life of genuine purpose and lasting joy. Understanding the distinction between these two categories is paramount for anyone seeking to align their life with what truly matters, particularly within a Christian worldview as articulated by Lewis. The essence of his teaching here lies in discerning the ultimate object of our affection and allegiance. When we grasp the significance of the First Things, we begin to reorient our entire existence, moving away from fleeting satisfactions towards enduring fulfillment. This framework, consistently woven throughout his

writings, offers a robust apologetic for the Christian life and a profound personal challenge to re-examine our priorities.

What are the First Things in C.S. Lewis's Theology?

The First Things, as presented by C.S. Lewis, represent that which is ultimate, that which is God Himself and our relationship with Him. These are the intrinsic goods, the eternal realities that form the bedrock of a meaningful existence. In Lewis's understanding, the First Things are not merely desirable; they are necessary for true human flourishing. They are the things that, when pursued and possessed, bring about genuine and lasting satisfaction. The ultimate First Thing is God – His presence, His love, and His kingdom. Closely aligned with this is the concept of divine truth and goodness. These are the foundational principles that govern reality and provide the ultimate meaning to all things. To seek the First Things is to seek God, to seek righteousness, and to seek eternal life. This pursuit involves a deep and abiding love for God above all else, a submission to His will, and a desire to reflect His character in our own lives. It is about orienting our deepest affections and our most earnest efforts towards the divine.

The Ultimate Pursuit: God as the Primary First Thing

C.S. Lewis consistently emphasized that God Himself is the ultimate First Thing. This isn't simply about acknowledging God's existence, but about cultivating a personal and intimate relationship with Him. For Lewis, this meant recognizing God as the source of all good, the author of reality, and the ultimate object of our worship and devotion. The pursuit of God as the First Thing involves a conscious effort to know Him more deeply through scripture, prayer, and community. It's about aligning our desires with His, seeking His kingdom first, and trusting in His provision and guidance. This pursuit is not a passive one; it requires active engagement and a willingness to surrender our own will to His. When God is truly the First Thing, all other aspects of life fall into their proper perspective, creating a harmonious and purposeful existence.

Divine Truth and Goodness as Essential First Things

Beyond the direct pursuit of God, Lewis identified divine truth and goodness as crucial First Things. These are not abstract philosophical concepts but inherent qualities of God Himself that He desires to impart to His creation. Divine truth encompasses the objective reality of God's nature, His purposes, and His moral law. Living in accordance with this truth means embracing honesty, integrity, and a commitment to what is objectively right. Divine goodness, on the other hand, refers to the benevolent and redemptive nature of God. It is the active outworking of His love and grace in the world. To embrace divine goodness is to strive for love, compassion, forgiveness, and justice in our own lives, mirroring the character of our Creator. These are the enduring values that provide moral clarity and spiritual substance, guiding us away from superficiality and towards a life of authentic meaning.

The Kingdom of God as the Primary Goal

In line with Jesus' teaching to "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness," Lewis saw the Kingdom of God as a paramount First Thing. This refers not only to a future heavenly realm but also to God's reign in the hearts and lives of believers in the present. Prioritizing the Kingdom means submitting to God's authority, embracing His values, and working for the advancement of His purposes on earth. It involves a radical reorientation of our priorities, placing God's will above our own ambitions and worldly desires. This pursuit fosters a sense of cosmic citizenship and a deep understanding of our place within God's grand design. When we truly seek the Kingdom, our actions and decisions are informed by an eternal perspective, leading to choices that align with divine, rather than temporal, objectives.

The Nature of Second Things and their Place in Life

In contrast to the First Things, the Second Things are the temporal, created realities of life. These are the good things that God has provided for our enjoyment and use, but they are not the ultimate end of our existence. Examples of Second Things include relationships, careers, possessions, health, and even our own comfort and happiness. Lewis was not a proponent of asceticism that denies the value of these created goods. Instead, he argued that their true value and enjoyment are only fully realized when they are seen as reflections or instruments of the First Things. When we try to make Second Things our ultimate goal, they inevitably lead to disappointment, frustration, and a sense of emptiness. The crucial insight is that Second Things are meant to be enjoyed in God and through God, not as substitutes for Him.

Created Goods: Gifts to be Enjoyed Responsibly

C.S. Lewis viewed the vast array of created goods – from the beauty of nature to the warmth of friendship – as blessings from God. These Second Things are not inherently evil or to be shunned. Rather, they are gifts that can bring joy, comfort, and fulfillment to our lives. The key lies in how we approach them. If we view these created things as the ultimate source of our happiness, we are bound to be disappointed. However, when we recognize them as gifts from God, expressions of His generosity and love, we can enjoy them with gratitude and a proper perspective. This means not becoming possessive of them, not allowing them to become idols, and always remembering that they are temporary and dependent on God's continued blessing. The responsible enjoyment of Second Things enhances our appreciation for the Giver.

The Danger of Idolizing Second Things

The most significant danger associated with Second Things, according to Lewis, is the tendency to idolize them. When we elevate a created good – be it wealth, reputation, a particular relationship, or even a cause – to the status of an ultimate good, we are essentially replacing God with it. This inversion of priorities leads to spiritual idolatry, a subtle yet pervasive sin that can derail our journey towards genuine fulfillment. When our happiness and sense of worth become contingent upon the

possession or success of a Second Thing, we become enslaved to it. The pursuit of such an idol often leads to anxiety, greed, pride, and a profound sense of dissatisfaction, even when the object of our idolatry is seemingly attained. The allure of the Second Thing becomes so powerful that it distracts us from the true source of all joy.

Finding True Satisfaction in God's Provision

Lewis's central argument is that true and lasting satisfaction can only be found in God, the ultimate First Thing. While Second Things can provide temporary pleasure and comfort, they can never fill the deep longing of the human heart. This longing, which Lewis often referred to as “sehnsucht” or innate desire, is God’s way of drawing us to Himself. When we direct our desires towards God, we discover a satisfaction that is not dependent on external circumstances or the possession of created goods. This satisfaction comes from being in right relationship with our Creator, from knowing His love, and from participating in His divine life. It is a deep wellspring of joy that can sustain us through all of life’s ups and downs, a testament to the enduring nature of the First Things.

The Interplay Between First and Second Things

The relationship between First Things and Second Things is not one of rigid separation but rather one of intricate connection and interdependence, as understood by C.S. Lewis. The First Things are the foundation upon which a proper appreciation and enjoyment of the Second Things are built. When God is rightly placed at the center of our lives, our perception and engagement with the created world are transformed. We can then embrace the good things of life with genuine gratitude and without the anxiety of idolatry. Conversely, a misguided pursuit of Second Things can eclipse or even obscure the importance of the First Things, leading to a life devoid of ultimate meaning and satisfaction. Lewis’s framework highlights a dynamic interplay where the eternal informs the temporal, and the temporal can, when rightly ordered, point us back to the eternal.

How Prioritizing First Things Enhances Second Things

When we make God and His Kingdom the First Things, our experience of the Second Things is profoundly enhanced. Instead of grasping at created goods with desperation, we receive them with thankfulness as gifts from a loving Father. Relationships become less about personal need and more about reflecting God’s love. Our work, whatever its nature, can be seen as a stewardship of God-given talents and a means of serving others, aligning with His purposes. Possessions are viewed not as ends in themselves but as resources to be used for God’s glory and the good of His people. This reorientation liberates us from the relentless pursuit of more and allows us to find contentment and joy in what we have, knowing that our ultimate security and worth are found in God alone. The secondary blessings of life are then experienced with a purity and depth that is impossible when they are made primary.

The Perils of Seeking Second Things First

The inverse is equally true: attempting to attain happiness or fulfillment by prioritizing Second Things first is a futile and ultimately destructive endeavor. When we seek wealth as the primary goal, it can lead to greed, dishonesty, and a hollow heart, even if wealth is acquired. If a particular relationship is made the ultimate object of our desire, it can create unhealthy dependency and possessiveness, ultimately damaging the very relationship we cherish. Similarly, if personal comfort or reputation becomes paramount, it can lead to compromise of integrity and a life lived in fear of judgment. These pursuits, when prioritized above the First Things, become chains that bind us, preventing us from experiencing the true freedom and joy that God intends for us. The pursuit of the temporal without reference to the eternal is a recipe for lasting disappointment.

The Spiritual Lens: Seeing God in the Mundane

A crucial aspect of the interplay between First and Second Things is the development of a spiritual lens through which we view the ordinary realities of life. C.S. Lewis encouraged believers to see God's hand in the mundane, to recognize His presence in the everyday. This means not only seeking out grand spiritual experiences but also finding God in the simple act of enjoying a meal, in the beauty of a sunset, or in the laughter of a child. When we cultivate this perspective, the Second Things become conduits for experiencing the First. They are not distractions from God but opportunities to connect with Him. This spiritual perception transforms our experience of life, imbuing even the most ordinary moments with divine significance and a deep sense of gratitude.

Why Prioritizing First Things Leads to Fulfillment

C.S. Lewis's core assertion is that prioritizing the First Things – God, truth, goodness, and His Kingdom – is the direct pathway to genuine and lasting fulfillment. This is not merely a theological assertion but a statement about the very nature of human design. Our hearts, Lewis argued, are wired to seek ultimate meaning and connection, and only God can satisfy this profound yearning. When we orient our lives around Him, we find a purpose that transcends our individual circumstances and a joy that is not dependent on the fluctuating fortunes of the created world. This prioritization offers a stable foundation, a secure identity, and an unshakeable hope that sustains us through life's challenges.

The Inherent Limitations of Created Goods

The Second Things, by their very nature, are temporal and contingent. Possessions can be lost, relationships can change or end, health can fail, and even the most fulfilling career can face unforeseen obstacles. While these created goods can bring pleasure, they are inherently limited in their capacity to provide ultimate satisfaction. To place our ultimate hope and happiness in them is to build our lives on shifting sands. C.S. Lewis understood that this is the root of much human anxiety and dissatisfaction. We are constantly chasing after things that, even when attained, cannot fundamentally address our deepest needs. Recognizing these limitations is a crucial step in understanding why the First Things are indispensable for true fulfillment.

Discovering True Identity and Purpose in God

When we make God the First Thing, we begin to discover our true identity and purpose. In Him, we are not defined by our achievements, our possessions, or the opinions of others, but by His unfailing love and His divine plan for us. This understanding liberates us from the pressures of worldly success and the fear of failure. Our purpose shifts from self-gratification to glorifying God and serving others according to His will. This vocational perspective, rooted in our identity as beloved children of God, provides a deep and abiding sense of meaning that no created good can ever replicate. It is in this alignment with the First Things that we find our most authentic selves and our greatest purpose.

The Joy of Eternal Perspective

Prioritizing the First Things cultivates an eternal perspective, which is a profound source of joy and resilience. When we understand that our ultimate destiny is with God and that this life is but a prelude to eternity, our present circumstances are viewed through a different lens. Difficulties are seen as opportunities for growth and refinement, and successes are recognized as blessings to be enjoyed with gratitude. This eternal outlook diminishes the power of worldly anxieties and fosters a deep-seated contentment. The joy derived from this perspective is not dependent on external factors but originates from a secure and unwavering hope in God's promises and His ultimate triumph. This perspective allows us to engage with the temporal without being consumed by it.

Practical Applications of C.S. Lewis's First and Second Things

The concepts of First and Second Things, as articulated by C.S. Lewis, are not merely theoretical but offer a practical roadmap for navigating life with greater purpose and spiritual clarity. Applying this framework involves conscious decision-making and a reordering of priorities in our daily lives. It requires a consistent effort to discern what truly matters and to align our actions with those eternal realities. By intentionally focusing on the First Things, we can transform our approach to everything else, finding deeper satisfaction and experiencing God's presence more profoundly in the everyday.

Reordering Personal Priorities

A fundamental application of Lewis's teaching is the active reordering of personal priorities. This involves examining our daily schedules, our financial commitments, and our mental energy to see where our focus truly lies. Are we dedicating the majority of our time and resources to pursuits that align with the First Things – prayer, spiritual growth, serving God and others, seeking truth? Or are our lives primarily consumed by the pursuit of comfort, entertainment, or material gain? The practice involves making conscious choices to allocate more time and attention to activities that nourish our souls and draw us closer to God, even if it means sacrificing some of the allure of Second Things. This might involve setting aside dedicated time for prayer, reading scripture, engaging in acts of service, or seeking out fellowship with other believers.

Mindful Consumption and Stewardship

The principles of First and Second Things also offer guidance on mindful consumption and responsible stewardship of our resources. When we view material possessions and wealth as Second Things, we are less likely to fall into the trap of consumerism and the relentless pursuit of more. Instead, we are encouraged to be content with what we have and to use our resources wisely, not for personal indulgence as the ultimate aim, but as a means to support the First Things – to serve God, to help others, and to advance His Kingdom. This stewardship extends to our time, our talents, and our energy, all of which are gifts to be used in accordance with God's purposes. It's about recognizing that all we have is on loan and should be managed with accountability to the Giver.

Cultivating Gratitude and Contentment

A direct outcome of prioritizing First Things is the cultivation of deep gratitude and contentment. When our focus is on God, we are more likely to appreciate the blessings He has bestowed upon us, recognizing even small things as gifts. This prevents the unhealthy comparison and envy that often plague those who are fixated on the possessions and achievements of others. By anchoring our joy in the unshakeable reality of God's love and presence, we find a contentment that is not dependent on having the "best" or the "most." This internal disposition shifts our focus from what we lack to what we have, fostering a peaceful and joyful outlook on life. It's about training our hearts to recognize the divine in the everyday.

Common Misconceptions about First and Second Things

While C.S. Lewis's framework of First and Second Things is powerful, it is also prone to misinterpretation. Understanding these common misconceptions is vital for correctly applying his insights. Many fall into the trap of believing that Second Things are inherently bad or should be avoided altogether, leading to an unbalanced or even unhealthy approach to life. Others may mistakenly believe that focusing on the First Things negates the importance of earthly responsibilities or relationships. Clarifying these potential misunderstandings ensures a more accurate and beneficial application of Lewis's profound spiritual philosophy.

The "All or Nothing" Fallacy

One prevalent misconception is the "all or nothing" fallacy, which suggests that one must either renounce all earthly pleasures and engagements to pursue the First Things, or that if one enjoys Second Things, one is necessarily neglecting the First. This is not Lewis's position. He did not advocate for a monastic or ascetic lifestyle that shuns the created world. Rather, he taught that Second Things should be enjoyed in and through the First Things. The error lies in making Second Things the ultimate object of pursuit. It is possible to enjoy a good meal, a healthy relationship, or a rewarding career, as long as these are seen as gifts from God and do not become idols that usurp His

rightful place in our lives. The key is orientation and the object of ultimate affection.

Confusing "Less Important" with "Evil"

Another common misunderstanding is the confusion of "less important" with "evil." Second Things are not evil; they are simply less important than the First Things in terms of eternal significance and ultimate fulfillment. To label a particular created good as "bad" simply because it is a Second Thing is to misinterpret Lewis. The potential for harm arises not from the nature of the Second Thing itself, but from its misplacement in our hierarchy of values. A healthy relationship, for example, is a wonderful Second Thing, but it becomes problematic when it is elevated above our relationship with God. The danger is not in the existence of the created good, but in our misplaced devotion to it.

The Assumption of a Life of Constant Spiritual Ecstasy

Some may also mistakenly assume that prioritizing First Things means experiencing constant spiritual ecstasy or dramatic supernatural encounters. While such experiences can occur, they are not the norm, nor are they the sole indicator of a life rightly ordered. True spiritual growth, as Lewis understood it, often involves a steady, sometimes unseen, transformation of character, a deepening of faith, and a growing ability to love and serve. The First Things are about building a solid foundation of faith and aligning one's will with God's, which often manifests in quiet obedience, enduring patience, and consistent love, rather than perpetual highs. The focus is on the faithfulness of the pursuit, not the intensity of the emotional experience.

The Role of Gratitude and Contentment

Within C.S. Lewis's framework of First and Second Things, gratitude and contentment emerge as essential byproducts of rightly ordered priorities. When we understand and embrace the First Things as our ultimate good, we are naturally inclined towards a posture of thankfulness for the secondary blessings of life. This appreciation for God's provision, coupled with the knowledge that our true security lies in Him, cultivates a profound sense of contentment that is independent of external circumstances. These virtues are not merely pleasant spiritual attitudes; they are powerful indicators of a soul that has found its proper anchor in the eternal.

Gratitude as a Response to Divine Provision

Gratitude, for Lewis, is a natural and necessary response to recognizing God as the source of all good. When we understand that even the smallest comforts and joys in life are ultimately gifts from our Creator, we are moved to express thankfulness. This is not a superficial acknowledgment but a deep-seated recognition of dependence and love. Cultivating gratitude shifts our focus from what we lack to what we have, fostering a positive outlook and preventing the corrosive effects of entitlement or dissatisfaction. It is a spiritual discipline that helps us to continually acknowledge God's presence and beneficence in our lives, even amidst challenges.

Contentment in God Alone

Contentment, in the Lewisian sense, is the deep peace that arises from finding our ultimate satisfaction in God, the First Thing. It is a freedom from the restless striving and anxious pursuit that characterize a life focused on Second Things. When our happiness is contingent upon external possessions, achievements, or relationships, we are susceptible to constant disappointment. However, when our contentment is rooted in our relationship with God, it becomes unshakeable. This does not mean we cease to desire improvement or growth, but rather that our fundamental sense of well-being is not dependent on achieving certain worldly outcomes. It is a quiet assurance that we are loved, accepted, and secure in Him.

The Connection Between First Things and a Peaceful Heart

There is an undeniable connection between prioritizing the First Things and experiencing a peaceful heart. By orienting our lives towards the eternal and the unchanging, we gain a perspective that transcends the anxieties and uncertainties of the temporal world. When we trust in God's plan and His provision, we are freed from the burden of trying to control every aspect of our lives. This trust fosters a deep sense of peace, allowing us to face challenges with courage and to enjoy blessings with unreserved joy. The pursuit of the First Things is, therefore, a direct pathway to a tranquil and flourishing inner life, characterized by a quiet confidence in God's sovereignty and love.

C.S. Lewis's First and Second Things in Modern Context

The enduring relevance of C.S. Lewis's concepts of First and Second Things is perhaps most evident when we consider their application in our contemporary world. Modern society often bombards individuals with messages that elevate Second Things – material possessions, career success, fleeting pleasures, and personal comfort – to the status of ultimate goals. In such an environment, Lewis's distinction serves as a vital counter-cultural emphasis, guiding individuals toward a more meaningful and fulfilling existence. His insights provide a much-needed corrective to the prevailing cultural narrative, encouraging a deeper examination of what truly constitutes a good life.

Navigating a Culture of Consumerism

In today's consumer-driven culture, the temptation to prioritize Second Things is pervasive. Advertising constantly promotes new products and experiences as keys to happiness, creating an endless cycle of desire and dissatisfaction. Lewis's framework offers a powerful antidote to this. By consciously identifying and pursuing the First Things – spiritual growth, love for God, truth, and service – individuals can resist the siren call of consumerism. This involves cultivating a discerning mind, questioning societal expectations, and intentionally directing resources and energy toward activities that foster spiritual well-being rather than material accumulation. It's about choosing eternal value over temporal gratification.

The Digital Age and the Distraction of Second Things

The digital age presents unique challenges in distinguishing between First and Second Things. Social media, entertainment platforms, and constant connectivity can become powerful distractions, pulling our focus away from what truly matters. While technology itself is a Second Thing, its misuse can easily lead to the idolization of fleeting pleasures, comparisons with others, and a general scattering of our spiritual attention. Applying Lewis's principles in this context requires intentional effort to use technology as a tool for good, to connect with others meaningfully, and to seek out spiritual nourishment, rather than allowing it to become a constant source of diversion from the First Things. Digital discernment is key.

Finding Purpose in a Pluralistic World

In a pluralistic modern world, the clarity provided by Lewis's framework is particularly valuable. While various worldviews offer different paths and priorities, Lewis's emphasis on the First Things as ultimately centering on God offers a consistent and unwavering anchor. His arguments, rooted in reason and experience, provide a compelling case for orienting one's life around divine truth and goodness, regardless of external cultural trends. This focus on the eternal provides a stable foundation for personal identity and a clear sense of purpose, even amidst the diverse and often conflicting messages of contemporary society. It offers a timeless compass for navigating a complex world.

Conclusion: Embracing the First Things for Lasting Fulfillment

C.S. Lewis's enduring concept of First and Second Things offers a profound and practical guide for navigating the complexities of life and achieving genuine, lasting fulfillment. By distinguishing between the ultimate realities of God, truth, and His Kingdom (the First Things) and the temporal blessings of the created world (the Second Things), Lewis provides a clear path toward a life of purpose and joy. Prioritizing the First Things means orienting our deepest affections and efforts towards God, recognizing that true satisfaction and identity are found in Him alone. This framework guards against the pervasive danger of idolizing Second Things, which inevitably leads to disappointment and spiritual emptiness. The interplay between these two categories reveals how a right relationship with God enhances our experience of all created goods, transforming them into expressions of divine generosity rather than sources of ultimate dependence. In the modern context, this wisdom is more critical than ever, offering a powerful counter-narrative to a culture often fixated on superficial pleasures and material acquisition. By consciously reordering our priorities, cultivating gratitude, and embracing contentment in God, we can find a peace and purpose that transcend fleeting worldly concerns, truly embodying the essence of C.S. Lewis's timeless spiritual teachings.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the core concept of C.S. Lewis's "The First and Second Things"?

The core concept of "The First and Second Things" is the distinction between what is truly real and eternal (the 'First Things') and what is temporary, earthly, or derived from those realities (the 'Second Things'). Lewis argues that our focus should primarily be on the First Things, as neglecting them leads to a misordering of our desires and a distortion of our understanding of life.

How does "The First and Second Things" relate to Christian theology?

The concept directly aligns with Christian theology by emphasizing God as the ultimate 'First Thing' and our eternal relationship with Him. The 'Second Things' are the good, created things of the world, but they become problematic when pursued as ultimate ends in themselves rather than as reflections or means to attaining the First Thing.

What are some examples of 'Second Things' that people often mistakenly elevate?

Examples of 'Second Things' that people often mistakenly elevate include wealth, fame, pleasure, power, intellectual achievements, and even earthly relationships. While these can be good in moderation and in their proper place, they become idols when they are pursued as the ultimate source of happiness or meaning, overshadowing the pursuit of God.

What is the danger of prioritizing 'Second Things' over 'First Things' according to Lewis?

According to Lewis, the danger of prioritizing 'Second Things' over 'First Things' is that it leads to a distorted reality, a perpetual dissatisfaction, and ultimately, spiritual impoverishment. It's like trying to eat the shadow instead of the substance, or admiring the map more than the territory it represents.

How can one discern between a 'First Thing' and a 'Second Thing' in their own life?

Lewis suggests examining our deepest desires and affections. If a desire, when fulfilled, brings lasting satisfaction and points us towards something greater, it's likely aligned with a 'First Thing.' If it provides only fleeting pleasure and leaves us wanting more or feeling empty, it's probably a 'Second Thing' being treated as an ultimate end.

What does Lewis mean by 'perfectionism' in relation to 'First and Second Things'?

Lewis often connects a misordered pursuit of 'Second Things' to a form of perfectionism. When we

strive for flawless earthly achievements or perfect earthly happiness, we are attempting to achieve an ultimate state from temporal, flawed means, which is impossible and detracts from focusing on the perfect 'First Thing' which is God.

Is the concept of 'First and Second Things' applicable outside of a purely religious context?

Yes, the concept has broader philosophical and psychological applicability. It can be understood as distinguishing between fundamental truths or ultimate values versus superficial or instrumental goals. It speaks to the human tendency to get lost in the details or distractions of life and forget the more profound purposes or realities that give life meaning.

What practical advice does Lewis offer for reorienting one's focus from 'Second Things' to 'First Things'?

Lewis's advice often involves practices like prayer, meditation, studying scripture, and engaging in acts of selfless love and service. These practices are intended to help individuals reorient their desires and affections towards God and eternal realities, thereby gaining a proper perspective on earthly matters.

How does the concept of 'The First and Second Things' inform Lewis's views on suffering?

Lewis suggests that suffering can be a catalyst for reorienting our focus. When our 'Second Things' are stripped away by suffering, it can force us to confront our misplaced affections and turn our attention towards the enduring 'First Things,' particularly God, who remains when all else is lost.

Additional Resources

Here are 9 book titles related to C.S. Lewis's Mere Christianity (often considered his "first and second things"), with short descriptions:

1. Mere Christianity

This foundational work presents C.S. Lewis's arguments for the core doctrines of Christianity, distilled from radio talks given during World War II. Lewis uses clear, accessible language and logical reasoning to explain concepts like the existence of God, the problem of sin, and the divinity of Christ. It aims to reach individuals of all backgrounds, regardless of their religious affiliation, by focusing on the common ground of Christian belief.

2. The Screwtape Letters

Presented as a series of letters from a senior demon, Screwtape, to his nephew Wormwood, this satirical novel offers a darkly humorous perspective on the spiritual warfare between good and evil. Screwtape advises Wormwood on the most effective ways to tempt a human soul away from God and towards damnation. The book cleverly exposes human weaknesses and the subtle strategies of temptation.

3. The Problem of Pain

In this philosophical exploration, C.S. Lewis tackles the age-old question of suffering and its place in a world created by a benevolent God. He argues that pain, though difficult, serves a purpose in revealing our dependence on God and drawing us closer to Him. Lewis asserts that the "joy" God offers is far greater than any earthly pleasure and worth the struggles we face.

4. The Great Divorce

This imaginative allegorical novel depicts a bus trip from a grey, dreary "Hell" to a vibrant, beautiful "Heaven." Passengers are given a chance to leave their unhappiness behind and begin a new existence. However, many are so attached to their grievances and pride that they refuse the invitation, choosing to remain in their self-made misery.

5. Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life

This autobiography chronicles C.S. Lewis's spiritual journey, from his early atheism to his eventual conversion to Christianity. He recounts his childhood experiences, his intellectual struggles, and the moments of profound insight that ultimately led him to embrace faith. The title refers to the concept of "sehnsucht," a deep longing for something unknown that Lewis experienced.

6. Miracles

Lewis defends the concept of miracles against skeptical objections in this rigorous theological and philosophical work. He argues that if God exists, then miracles are not only possible but probable, as they are expressions of God's intervention in His own creation. The book systematically dismantles common arguments against supernatural events.

7. God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics

This collection of essays explores a wide range of theological and ethical issues, demonstrating Lewis's characteristic wit and clarity. Topics range from the nature of belief and doubt to discussions on forgiveness, justice, and the challenges of living a Christian life in the modern world. The title reflects Lewis's willingness to have his faith examined and questioned.

8. The Abolition of Man

Lewis critically examines modern educational philosophies and their potential to strip humanity of its core values and moral compass. He warns against the dangers of instrumentalism, where education is reduced to training individuals for specific societal functions rather than nurturing their humanity. The book argues for the necessity of objective moral truths.

9. Christian Behaviour

A shorter, more direct exploration of Christian ethics, this book draws heavily from the principles laid out in Mere Christianity. Lewis addresses practical matters of how Christians should behave in their daily lives, focusing on virtues like humility, forgiveness, and charity. He emphasizes that Christian morality is not about following a set of rules but about inner transformation.

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