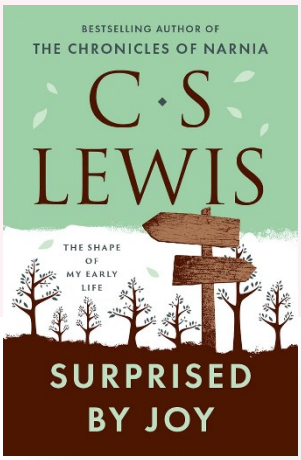
LEADER'S GUIDE

SURPRISED BY JOY
BY C. S. LEWIS



"When we set out I did not believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and when we reached the zoo I did."

C. S. LEWIS

THEMES

Imagination | Theology | Autobiographical | Faith | Mythology | Grief | Storytelling

ABOUT THE BOOK

Surprised by Joy is C. S. Lewis's spiritual autobiography, tracing his journey from childhood to Christianity. Lewis reflects on the experiences, books, people, and moments of longing that shaped his imagination and slowly led him from atheism to belief in God. He explores the idea of "joy" as a deep, mysterious longing for something beyond the world—something he eventually recognised as a desire for God himself. Through memories of his childhood, his education, his friendships, and his intellectual struggles, Lewis describes how his search for meaning unexpectedly brought him to faith. The book is both a personal story and a reflection on how imagination, reason, and grace can work together in a person's journey toward belief.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS & TALKING POINTS

1

Q. What is one of your favourite books, essays or writings from C. S. Lewis? Why is it your favourite?

TALKING POINTS

C. S. Lewis wrote over 30 books, and many more essays across a wide variety of genres (see pages 255-257 for a complete list)

- Apologetics and Theology
- Fiction and Poetry
- Literary Criticism
- Autobiographical

2

Q. How did Lewis' childhood cultivate creativity and imagination?

TALKING POINTS

As Lewis was often a sickly child, he was kept indoors with books and his imaginary world to occupy his time.

- Lewis's father had an extensive library where no book was out of bounds – he was free to read anything and everything his heart desired. Lewis consumed books such as Gulliver's Travels, Paradise Lost and many E. Nesbit stories at this early age.
- Lewis and Warnie had created a world together up in the attic, but when Warren was sent to school, Lewis increased his reading time and continued to create the Boxen world himself.
- Boxen was an imagined land with chivalrous animals, and a King Bunny, complete with maps, chronologies and lists of rulers.

3

Q. Lewis lived a story-formed life and was significantly impacted by many books, including those by George Macdonald and tales of Norse Mythology. How did these stories grow and shape his faith over his lifetime?

TALKING POINTS

- "The reading of good books will make us wiser, broaden our horizons, challenge our thinking, give flight to our imagination, and provide us hours of enjoyment." – Terry Glaspey
- "We all all story-formed" – Sarah Clarkson

4

Q. Which stories have been most formative in your own life? Why?

TALKING POINTS

We're all formed by stories. Whether it's the stories spoken over us, the stories we surround ourselves with, or the greatest story ever told of God and His great love for us. Each of us has a story to tell, and (hopefully) books that have been fundamental in our formation, spiritual growth, and worldview.

5

Q. Lewis' conversion to Christianity was not a sudden or dramatic moment, but a slow and steady gradual shift. What were some of the integral moments of his conversion?

TALKING POINTS

While Lewis was raised in a Christian home, the legalism and formalities only deterred him;

- Firstly, Lewis had to acknowledge the powerful influence Christianity had played in shaping the culture he loved and also realised that many of his favourite authors, who had beautiful and sensible views of the world, were profoundly influenced by Christian worldviews.
- Owen Barfield convinced Lewis of the errors of Kirkpatrick's philosophical realism and how this was at odds with his romantic longings.
- At this stage, Lewis' beliefs shifted from naturalism to theism, and on a bus ride travelling up Headington Hill, Lewis realised he could no longer ignore what he had begun to see as the truth.
- Finally, a conversation with Tolkien and Hugo Dyson on myths solidified Lewis' new beliefs and 12 days afterwards, he confessed to being a Christian.

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Q. How did C. S. Lewis' thoughts on life, faith and love enlighten you? After reading *Surprised by Joy* were you given something new to think about, or was your mind changed about something?

TALKING POINTS

Even in his works of fiction, Lewis puts forward a compelling and reasonable case for Christianity; His commentary on a wide variety of topics from faith and intellect, miracles, pain, friendship, books, humour, sin, hell and the devil - and so much more – contain so much wisdom!

7

Q. Lewis openly reflects on his struggles with vice, pride, depression, intellectual arrogance, and his resistance towards Christianity. How did these struggles shape his understanding of himself and his journey towards faith?

TALKING POINTS

- Lewis describes seasons of loneliness, despair; showing how his inner struggles affected his worldview and relationships.
- His rejection of Christianity was not only intellectual; it was also influenced by pride, a desire for independence, and a reluctance to surrender control of his life to God.
- Lewis's honesty about his faults, temptations, and "anti-Christian" attitudes highlights the tension between human weakness and the possibility of transformation through grace.

8

Q. In *The Chronicles of Narnia*, Lucy asks, "Is He [Aslan] safe?", to which the animals reply, "Course he isn't safe, but he is good... He is not a tame lion." How might this quote summarise Lewis' faith and life experience with God?

TALKING POINTS

To Lewis, faith was a commitment to and trust in God and Christian teachings in the face of daily distractions, grief and doubts.

9

Q. Discuss the very famous C. S. Lewis quote, "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks to us in our conscience, but shouts to us in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world."

TALKING POINTS

Lewis was a man who was acquainted with pain:

- Lewis lost his mother at an early age.
- He was then sent to an awful boarding school with a villainous headmaster.
- Lewis fought in the war.
- After a brief marriage to Joy, became a widower.

10

Q. *The Problem of Pain, Mere Christianity*, and *Miracles* are Lewis' great trilogy of apologetic works. Why do you think these books are considered to be classics that every Christian should read? If you haven't read them, which one will you endevour to pick up next?

TALKING POINTS

The apologetic trilogy:

- *The Problem With Pain* tackles the difficult problem of theodicy: the existence of evil and suffering in light of an omnipotent God.
- *Miracles* addresses the issue of whether miracles are incompatible with natural law or science.
- *Mere Christianity* makes for the overall rationality of the Christian faith.

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