

cs lewis first and second things

****Understanding C.S. Lewis First and Second Things: A Guide to Priorities and Purpose****

cs lewis first and second things is a phrase that has intrigued many readers and thinkers interested in the philosophy and theology of C.S. Lewis. Known for his profound insights into faith, morality, and human nature, Lewis's concept of "first things" and "second things" offers a compelling framework for understanding priorities in life. Whether you're a fan of his literary works or someone exploring spiritual wisdom, grasping this idea can bring clarity to how we approach our goals, relationships, and values.

The Meaning Behind C.S. Lewis First and Second Things

At its core, the notion of "first things" and "second things" reflects Lewis's perspective on what should be the ultimate focus of our lives versus the secondary goals that we sometimes mistakenly prioritize. In his writings, Lewis emphasizes that putting "second things" first leads to frustration and failure because these "second things" only have value when pursued in the right order.

What Are "First Things"?

"First things" refer to the fundamental, most important priorities—those things that should govern our entire outlook and behavior. For Lewis, this often related to spiritual truths and the pursuit of a meaningful relationship with God. First things are the ultimate ends, such as truth, love, or virtue, that give life coherence and purpose.

Defining "Second Things"

On the other hand, "second things" are the means, or the secondary objectives, that depend on the first things to have true significance. These might include wealth, career success, comfort, or even earthly happiness. While these things are not inherently bad, Lewis warns against elevating them above first things because doing so distorts our values.

Why Prioritizing First Things Matters

Lewis's insight into first and second things is more than just theoretical—it's practical advice for living well. When people reverse the natural order by placing "second things" first, they often experience a sense of emptiness or dissatisfaction.

Examples in Everyday Life

Consider the pursuit of happiness. Many chase after career achievements or material possessions thinking these “second things” will bring lasting joy. However, if these pursuits are disconnected from deeper values or purpose (the first things), happiness remains elusive. Lewis suggests that when first things are in place—like integrity, love, or faith—second things naturally fall into their proper place and contribute to genuine fulfillment.

The Danger of Misplaced Priorities

One of Lewis’s famous warnings is that if you put first things first, you get second things thrown in; but if you put second things first, you lose both first and second things. This paradox highlights how neglecting foundational values ultimately undermines even our secondary desires.

Tracing the Origins: Where Does This Idea Come From in Lewis’s Work?

The concept of first and second things appears in various forms throughout C.S. Lewis’s writings, especially in his essays and letters. It aligns closely with his Christian worldview, where the “first things” represent God and eternal truths, while “second things” are temporal and contingent.

Influence of Christian Philosophy

Lewis was deeply influenced by Christian thinkers like Augustine and Aquinas, who stressed the importance of ordering loves and goods correctly. This shaped his understanding that human flourishing depends on aligning ourselves with eternal realities before pursuing worldly goods.

Lewis’s Writings That Explore This Theme

Books such as **Mere Christianity** and **The Weight of Glory** touch on this ordering of values. In these works, Lewis encourages readers to examine their hearts and motivations, urging a conscious choice to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.

Applying C.S. Lewis First and Second Things

Today

The beauty of Lewis's insight is its timeless relevance. Whether you're navigating personal challenges, career decisions, or spiritual questions, recognizing the difference between first and second things can guide wiser choices.

Practical Tips for Identifying Your First Things

- **Reflect on what truly matters:** Take time to consider what gives your life meaning beyond temporary success.
- **Examine your motivations:** Are your daily actions driven by deeper principles or by fleeting desires?
- **Seek alignment with enduring values:** Whether faith, love, justice, or truth, find your "first things" and prioritize them.
- **Be willing to reorder priorities:** It's natural to get caught up in second things, but changing focus can lead to greater peace and purpose.

How to Avoid the Trap of Putting Second Things First

It helps to regularly assess your life's trajectory. Are you chasing goals that serve a deeper end, or are they ends in themselves? Practicing mindfulness and cultivating spiritual disciplines such as prayer, meditation, or journaling can keep first things foremost in your mind.

The Broader Impact of Lewis's Philosophy on Modern Thought

C.S. Lewis's distinction between first and second things resonates beyond theology. It has influenced leadership, psychology, and ethical discussions, emphasizing the importance of value-based living.

Leadership and Decision-Making

In leadership, prioritizing first things translates to focusing on core mission and vision rather than getting lost in short-term gains. Many business and life coaches reference Lewis's ideas to encourage clarity and purpose in decision-making.

Psychology and Well-being

Modern psychology acknowledges that a sense of purpose and alignment with core values is crucial for mental health. Lewis's framework reinforces the idea that external achievements alone cannot fulfill deeper human needs.

Ethical Living

Ethics often hinge on recognizing what should come first—honesty, compassion, justice—rather than convenience or self-interest. Lewis's insights help articulate why some actions fail to bring lasting good when detached from foundational moral principles.

Exploring cs lewis first and second things opens a window into a timeless wisdom about living intentionally. By distinguishing what truly deserves our highest loyalty from what merely serves as a means, Lewis challenges us to reorder our lives around enduring truths. Whether in faith, personal growth, or professional life, this perspective invites a richer, more grounded approach to the challenges and choices we face every day.

Frequently Asked Questions

What does C.S. Lewis mean by 'first things' and 'second things' in his writings?

C.S. Lewis uses 'first things' to refer to fundamental truths or ultimate realities, such as God or eternal values, while 'second things' are secondary concerns or practical matters that depend on the first things for their proper ordering and meaning.

Why does C.S. Lewis emphasize putting 'first things first' in his philosophy?

Lewis emphasizes putting 'first things first' because he believes that without prioritizing fundamental truths and ultimate realities, secondary matters become disordered and lose their true purpose, leading to confusion and moral error.

Can you provide an example from C.S. Lewis's work illustrating the concept of 'first and second things'?

In 'Mere Christianity,' Lewis discusses how morality (a second thing) depends on the existence of a moral lawgiver (a first thing, i.e., God). Without acknowledging the 'first thing,' the moral law loses its foundation and meaning.

How does the idea of 'first and second things' relate to Christian living according to C.S. Lewis?

According to Lewis, Christian living requires recognizing God as the ultimate 'first thing,' which then rightly orders all other aspects of life, such as relationships, work, and personal goals, ensuring they align with divine purpose.

Is the distinction between 'first and second things' unique to C.S. Lewis or part of a broader philosophical tradition?

The distinction is part of a broader philosophical and theological tradition emphasizing the hierarchy of values and the importance of prioritizing ultimate truths, but C.S. Lewis popularized and applied this concept effectively in his Christian apologetics.

Additional Resources

Cs Lewis First and Second Things: An Analytical Exploration of Priorities and Perspectives

cs lewis first and second things is a topic that delves into the philosophical and theological framework articulated by C.S. Lewis, one of the most influential writers and thinkers of the 20th century. His reflections on priorities, values, and the ordering of life's fundamental concerns offer profound insights, particularly for readers interested in ethics, spirituality, and personal development. This article investigates Lewis's concepts of "first" and "second" things, examining their implications in the broader context of his work and how these ideas resonate today.

Understanding C.S. Lewis's Concept of First and Second Things

At the core of Lewis's teachings lies a crucial differentiation between what he terms "first things" and "second things." This distinction is not merely a philosophical abstraction but a practical guide for living a coherent and meaningful life. Lewis posits that first things are the ultimate realities or ultimate ends—those values or truths that must take precedence in one's life. Second things are the secondary goals or means that depend on the first things for their proper context and meaning.

This hierarchy is famously encapsulated in Lewis's own advice: "Put first things first and second things will fall into place." It suggests that when one correctly prioritizes the fundamental aspects of existence (such as faith, love, or truth), the ancillary concerns will naturally align. Conversely, placing second things first leads to disorder and frustration.

The Philosophical and Theological Roots

Lewis's distinction draws heavily from classical and Christian philosophy, echoing thinkers like Augustine and Aquinas, who emphasized the ordering of loves and goods. In Christian theology, the primacy of God and relationship with the divine is the ultimate first thing. Everything else—career, relationships, material success—must be oriented around that central truth to avoid distortion.

By framing first and second things in this manner, Lewis provides a framework for understanding moral life and spiritual growth. It is a call to recognize foundational truths before pursuing secondary ambitions, a perspective that challenges modern secular tendencies to invert these priorities.

Applications of First and Second Things in Lewis's Works

Lewis's reflections on first and second things permeate his essays, letters, and fiction. They are not isolated ideas but recurring themes that shape his worldview and literary output.

First and Second Things in “Mere Christianity”

In “Mere Christianity,” Lewis systematically explores Christian belief and practice, continually emphasizing the importance of putting first things first. He argues that moral behavior and spiritual health depend on acknowledging the primacy of God's will and love. For Lewis, ethical living is not about following rules arbitrarily but about aligning oneself with the ultimate Good.

He warns against prioritizing social status, wealth, or personal comfort—second things—as ends in themselves. Instead, these should be pursued only insofar as they support the first things. This perspective provides a corrective to materialism and self-centeredness prevalent in his time and ours.

Insights from “The Weight of Glory” and Other Essays

In his essay “The Weight of Glory,” Lewis explores the human longing for transcendence and the desire for ultimate meaning. Here, the first things involve eternal realities—heaven, divine love, and ultimate fulfillment. The second things are temporal and fleeting, such as worldly recognition or pleasure.

Lewis's insight is that recognizing this distinction helps individuals navigate life's challenges with perspective. It encourages patience and hope, as well as a more generous and ethical engagement with the world.

Practical Implications of Lewis's Philosophy

The concept of first and second things is not merely theoretical; it has practical implications for decision-making, personal development, and leadership.

Prioritization and Decision-Making

In an age overwhelmed with choices and distractions, Lewis's framework offers clarity. By identifying what truly matters—the first things—individuals and organizations can make more coherent and effective decisions. This approach reduces stress caused by conflicting priorities and promotes long-term well-being.

Challenges in Applying the Concept

However, applying Lewis's ideas is not without challenges. Determining what constitutes a "first thing" can be subjective and culturally conditioned. For some, spiritual faith is paramount; for others, different values may hold that position. Lewis's Christian worldview provides a specific lens, which might not resonate universally, yet his overarching principle of ordering priorities remains relevant.

Comparative Perspectives: Lewis and Contemporary Thought

Lewis's emphasis on first and second things aligns with modern psychological research on values and motivation. Studies show that individuals who prioritize intrinsic goals such as personal growth and relationships tend to experience greater life satisfaction than those focused on extrinsic goals like wealth or fame.

Moreover, Lewis's framework parallels strategic management principles, where mission and vision (first things) guide operational objectives (second things). This demonstrates the enduring relevance of his ideas beyond theology, into psychology, leadership, and ethics.

Pros and Cons of Lewis's Approach

- **Pros:** Provides clear guidance on prioritization; integrates spirituality with practical living; encourages ethical consistency.
- **Cons:** Rooted in Christian doctrine, which may not appeal to all; can be interpreted rigidly, limiting flexibility; requires deep self-reflection that some may find

challenging.

Legacy and Continued Relevance of First and Second Things

The legacy of C.S. Lewis's first and second things is evident in ongoing discussions of ethics, spirituality, and personal development. His ability to articulate a hierarchy of values resonates with readers seeking meaning in a complex world.

Contemporary authors and speakers often reference Lewis's ideas when addressing topics like work-life balance, moral clarity, and spiritual growth. His insistence on putting first things first continues to challenge prevailing cultural narratives that prioritize immediate gratification and material success.

In sum, C.S. Lewis's first and second things remain a vital conceptual tool for anyone exploring the intersection of belief, values, and practical living. They invite a thoughtful reconsideration of what truly matters and how to structure life accordingly, making Lewis's insights as compelling today as they were during his lifetime.

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need for roots What We Hold in Trust unfolds in four chapters that will demonstrate how essential it is for the faculty, administrators, and trustees of Catholic universities to think philosophically and theologically (Chapter One), historically (Chapter Two) and institutionally (Chapters Three and Four). What we desperately need today are leaders in Catholic universities who understand the roots of the institutions they serve, who can wisely order the goods of the university, who know what is primary and what is secondary, and who can distinguish fads and slogans from authentic reform. We need leaders who are in touch with their history and have a love for tradition, and in particular for the Catholic tradition. Without this vision, our universities may grow in size, but shrink in purpose. They may be richer but not wiser.

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Memorizing Scripture can seem overwhelming—like one more task on a checklist. But pastor Joshua Choonmin Kang has discovered what happens when we do spend time memorizing God's Word: we grasp a larger, truer picture of God. Pastor Kang also knows that memorizing Scripture isn't easy. In these thirty short devotional readings he helps us grow in this important practice.

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to be more. Nothing more is a cruel joke that life and love are meaningless. All logic and reason demand there be more, and we should act as if there is even much more love in anticipation. And if there isn't, then there ought to be! Regardless, the world would be better by believing in such and acting as such. The book provides some articles but most of it is the way to live a transcendental life: organized matter sanctified and given a soul by identity, truth, oneness, good and beauty for everyone's life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness—partially the subtitle of the book. You get substance and the transcendental principles for living that save by actuality for a change. This is in contrast to the virtual reality culture of the unreliable manipulating self-discrediting noisy glitzy press & media imposed substanceless non-being which, by suggestibility, turns us into choiceless aliens instead of free persons for the planet. By the self-worshipping self-discrediting press & media, we are on the madman road-rage race to the bottom culture of pollution, disgust, death, and decline. Not by this book. Against vulgar suggestibility and glitz caused gullibility, this book gives real being by teaching six analogous ways of living the wisdom-filled eight categories of metaphors of love in the cone of space-time: As a human particle by elementary physics—event, spectrum, field, quantum, singularity, dimension, uncertainty, and force. As a human being by community universals—dignity, unity, integrity, identity, spirituality, life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness. As a Catholic, Roman or otherwise, by the sacraments—Baptism, Penance, Holy Communion, Extreme Unction, Holy Orders, Matrimony, and Grace. As a Christian by the virtues—faith, hope, charity, prudence, justice, courage, temperance, and holiness. As a patient by the universal variables of all therapy—living things are precious, selective ignoring, subdued spontaneity, non-self excluded, affect assistance, detached warmth & gentleness, non-reactive listening, C2CC centered candidness, and peace & mercy. And as sanctified by the last words of the crucified Christ. Take your pick or combine them all. Except for the quantity, it is simple. Thousands of aphorisms and concepts about every imaginable topic are offered to teach ancient secrets from nature and nature's God (to quote the Founding Fathers of America). Interspersed in the book are the world's first SEX SATIRES...fiery hilarious...which will help all cope with the prurience flooding the world as entertainment, advertisement and games. SEX SATIRE, properly applied to those exploiting sex, will free you from sex craziness and help keep society's prurience from disrupting your transcendental life. Read it through once; then a few pages or a chapter daily; and problem-solve as needed by index and perusal. You will be better. The world will be better. You will learn to be a real human being for everyone. And you will have your soul back by embracing the universal Mass mantra: life-sacrifice-virtue-love-humanity-peace-freedom-death.

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