

# Get on the Bus

## *The Great Divorce Part 1: Leaving*

October 27, 2024

Today we're beginning our journey through C.S. Lewis's book *The Great Divorce*. Cuz as we've discussed, how we see our destiny decides how we live our life. And in his book, Lewis paints compelling pictures of potential futures that have great power to change our lives in the present.



Specifically, he challenges how we see Heaven and Hell by taking us on a fictional trip from one to the other – and then convicts our hearts with the cast of characters we meet along the way. And as the story unfolds, it becomes clear how their choices mirror the spiritual choices we make every day; choices between staying in the imperfect life we know or leaving to pursue something better and new.



And since Lewis aims to prove these choices are mutually exclusive, one-or-the-other decisions, they're ultimately represented by a simple symbol: A BUS – that's always available and free of charge to anyone who wants to leave Hell and make the journey to Heaven! Which supplies our central question of this series: Would you board the bus?



Well duh! Who wouldn't?! Free tickets to Paradise? Pack your bags and we'll leave tonight! Right? Well, as the rest of the book explains – it's just not that simple. In fact, our whole lives are full of reasons to stay off the bus. Because familiar feels safe and foreign feels frightening. And there's nothing more familiar than our lives down here.

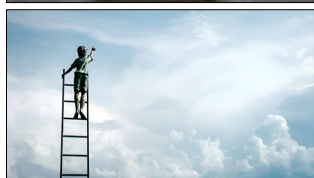
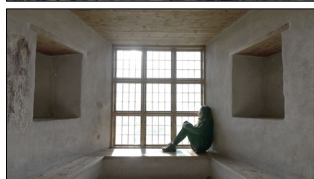


[Which is why James practically yells:] Don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. – James 4:4 NIV

And the same goes for those in our book. Choosing to stay in the life they know means never leaving to find something better. But then again, are things really that bad in Hell? I mean, I was under the impression there would be pitchforks and torture but the way Lewis portrays the Grey Town doesn't sound a whole lot different from some soggy Northwest evenings in October.

Cuz he describes a dreary and drizzly city that feels kind of empty and cold with very few people out and about. Sure, it's perpetually twilight – but never quite all-the-way night. And everyone and everything does seem a little hollow, disconnected, and ghostly – but all the residents of Grey Town do have a sense of freedom because they can have whatever they want by simply imagining it – the only caveat being that the things they create are insubstantial and hollow, just like them.

So, because they're never *fully satisfied*, they *bicker* and *fight*, trying to *blame* their frustration on *each other* before deciding to use their power to build new homes *farther* and *farther* from everyone *else* – as their *hollow freedom* slowly leads them to build *hollow lives*. Yikes.



**Really think about that reality.** An *eternity* of unfulfilled *desires* and *lonely frustration* would be more *miserable* than we can *imagine*; but it is a reasonable picture of what *separation* from God feels like; *bleak*. And *bleak* *doesn't* usually start off as *ultimate agony*, instead, it comes as the *gradual realization* of how *hopeless* we are on our own. **Nothing intolerable but also nothing inspirational.** It's the slow *suffocation* of spiritual *stagnation* that happens when we are left to rely on *ourselves*.

Like Lewis says about the Grey Towners, "**They leave behind everything but themselves, and yet it's themselves they fear most.**" And even though *isolation* is our *ultimate* punishment, God reminds it's up to us!

My people would *not* listen to Me ... So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts to follow their own devices. – Psalms 81:11-12 NIV

[So by *their choice*] They will be punished with everlasting destruction and [that begins with being] shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His might – 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9 NIV

**This is what spiritual stagnation looks like; alone and in need.** When we *choose* to live apart from God, we might *think* we are free because we can do *what* we want and live *how* we want – but when **all we want is ourself, freedom leads to empty isolation.**

And **it's not just physical separation from God and others, but an inner separation;** it's a deep disconnection from the *purpose* and *joy* that God *intended* for us. Cuz y'see, the people of Grey Town aren't *just* disconnected from *each other* but from *their true* identity as *residents* of Heaven.

**Are you?**

Down here, it's all too easy to fill our lives with the *daily distractions* and *material objects* that provide *fleeting* feelings of *fulfillment* – but *deep down*, **every one of us shares the nagging sensation of disconnection that comes from our Spirit being separated from its Source.** And when we try to ignore that *homesick* pain away, our frustration *festers* as our Spirit *stagnates*.

But God *allows* the pain in hope that we'll *choose* to *do something*. Cuz **doing nothing prevents us from getting better** because **doing nothing prevents us from changing.** And by *definition*, **getting better means making a change!** That's why *stagnation* is such a bad word *down here*; cuz when we're left *alone* and spiritually *separated* from God, things *can't* get better. And **if things aren't getting better, they are getting worse.** Cuz **all fires go out if they're not fed** and if the one *inside us* dies, so does our hope for *better*. And **in the end it's up to us to get on the bus.** Which is why Lewis opens our book with *himself* standing in line at the *Grey Town bus stop* to make *that choice*.

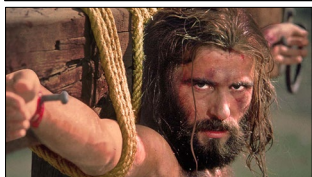


And as he waits, he watches as several ghostly *Grey Towners* leave the line with several *different reasons* for their change of *mind*. Which begs the big question: If getting to Heaven is as easy as getting on a bus, **why on earth wouldn't everyone go?** And it took me years to understand what makes such a simple choice so complicated; but it's *sin*. And we may not *feel* like we *choose* to live with sin – but we must *admit* we *haven't* chosen *not to*. Cuz the *familiarity* of any life-long roommate is a comfort that's hard to leave behind. But sin is *not invited* to Heaven. Like Lewis said, **“If we accept Heaven we shall not be able to retain even the smallest and most intimate souvenirs of Hell.”** So, when we consider boarding the bus, sin chimes in to try and hold us back:

[Like Paul says] I have the *desire* to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I *do* ... the *evil* I *do not* want to do ... [because] it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. – Romans 7:18-20 NIV

And that's what we start to see as Lewis waits in line to board the bus. Sin starts to find a way to keep people from moving out and moving on.

First, an *angry couple's fight* escalates until their *fit* reveals their self-centeredness would be better served by *staying* – and *then* the *arrogant* attitude of a short man leads to a fight that bruises his ego and keeps him from rejoining the line. After *that*, a *giggly* and *flirty* couple wanders away, clearly *more* concerned with *each other* than *the bus* – followed by a woman who gets *cheated* out of *her* spot for five bucks. And the common *thread* that keeps people *off* the bus starts to *emerge*: whether it's *anger*, *pride*, *lust*, or *greed*, **sin finds a way to hold people from pursuing Heaven.**



But still, when the bus appears, *Lewis* and a *handful* of others manage to make their way *on board* for the *first leg* of their journey *away*. But, *aboard* the bus, Lewis talks to *more* Ghosts from *Grey Town* who further *mock* the idea of Heaven, *criticize* whoever's in charge, and unanimously judge the Driver as a *condescending elitist* – just for coming down from *Heaven* to pick *them* up. Which ought to strike right at *our* hearts when we realize it's Jesus who came to rescue *us*, and just like the *Grey Town Ghosts*, **we offered Him hostility instead of gratitude while He was on the cross:**

Those who passed by hurled insults at Him, shaking their heads and ... In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked Him. – Matthew 27:39-41 NIV

And all He ever did was *love* us so much that He *left Heaven* to come get *us* – but **when we see something better, our life can look worse.** So we react with envious *animosity* for making us feel *shame* – when we should react with humble *appreciation* for making us feel *loved*. Because **shame rejects love but humility receives love** and it's a *fine line* between the two. And yet, both *Jesus* and the *Driver* press on to aim us home, *hoping* that a *glimpse* of Heaven will *inspire* us to keep going!

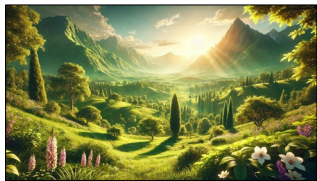


[Because they show the way but we make the choice!] Come near to God and He will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded... Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will lift you up. – James 4:8, 10 NIV

And even though further *fighting* and *discussions* reveal the Ghosts are still hesitant about Heaven and *holding on* to their lives in *Hell* – **they are indeed lifted up** as the bus takes flight and carries them across *vast distances* until they ultimately reach the *top* of an impossibly high *cliff*.



And as the bus *lands* on the *outskirts* of Heaven, Lewis and the Ghosts are confronted with the *realization* that **the reality of Heaven is overwhelming!** The landscape is the opposite of Grey Town – vibrantly colored and smelling of a *summer morning perpetually* on the cusp of *sunrise*. And as they step into the expansive nature, Lewis notes:



**“They were in fact ghosts: man-shaped stains on the brightness of that air. One could attend to them or ignore them at will as you do with the dirt on a window pane. I noticed that the grass did not bend under their feet: even the dew drops were not disturbed. Then ... I saw the whole phenomenon the other way round. The men were as they had always been... It was the light, the grass, the trees that were different; made of some different substance, so much solidier than things in our country – that men were ghosts by comparison.”**



And as they discover they're *too hollow* to *endure* the fullness of Heaven's *reality*, it becomes clear once *again* that *change* can bring *pain*. And in the same way it *hurts* to have our eyes adjust to the *light* after sleeping through the *night*, we see how **adjusting our lives to God's reality is a painful process**. But it is a necessary transformation for our relocation! So as Paul says:

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters ... [says Paul] to offer *your* bodies as a living sacrifice, ... Do not conform to the pattern of this world [down here], but be transformed by the renewing of your mind [as it adjusts to God's reality]. – Romans 12:1-2 NIV

But as the Ghosts continue *struggling* to navigate the *more than solid* ground, suddenly Lewis notices *another* group of *people* approaching from miles away! And as they slowly draw closer, he can *see* that they're *powerful* and *radiant* – and not only does the grass *bend* beneath *their* feet – but the *earth* *shook* with each of *their* steps. And just as Lewis notes *his* increasing *anxiety* – two other Ghosts to run screaming *back* to the bus and the chapter comes to an *end*. **Dun-dun-dun!**



But we're left with several *real-life* insights from the story *so far*:  
1.) **Leaving doesn't mean losing!** *Distancing* from one thing means *nearing* another and the things of this world only hold us back because  
2.) **Life apart from God only offers false freedom!** We may feel like we're in control but we can only make hollow *choices* in a hollow *life*.

And 3.) **Real life begins when we get on the bus!** Because getting to Heaven is not about *hard* work, it's about *heart* work. And the *moment* we start *seeking* God, God starts *changing* us!

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Father God, thank You for loving me in spite of my sin; forgive me and cleanse me by the sacrifice of Your Son, my Savior; and free me and lead me by Your Spirit and Word, as I seek to trust and follow Jesus Christ, as the Lord of my life. Amen.