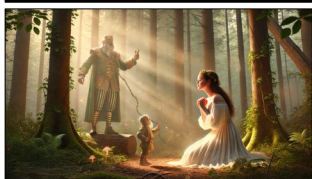
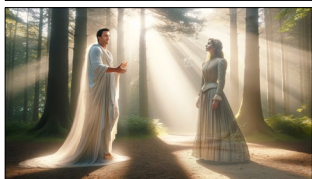


# Get on the Bus

## *The Great Divorce Part 5: Living*

November 24, 2024



Today we're finishing our trip through C.S. Lewis's *The Great Divorce* because this *fictional* journey has been providing *many* profound *metaphors* to greatly help us *spot* and *sort out* real-life *spiritual* struggles. And it *began* in Lewis's picture of Hell as the *hollow* and *hopeless* Grey Town, full of *ghostly* inhabitants who must choose to *board* a *bus* if they want to *pursue* life in *Heaven*. But, as *we've* seen, *sin* is expert at *subtly* holding people *back* from letting go of *old ways* to embrace *new life*. So, Lewis and his *Solid Spirit Guide*, George MacDonald have been *listening in* as *other* Heavenly Spirits try to convince *each* Grey Town Ghost to *surrender, stay*, and become *solid* by *adjusting* to Heaven's harsh as it *transforms* them into their *eternal* identity.

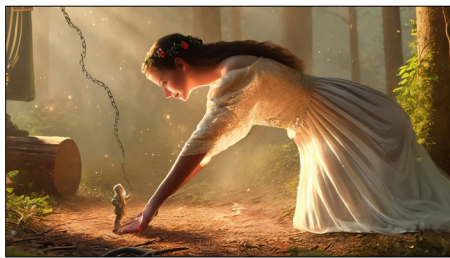
And most *recently*, we witnessed the *now-solid* Sarah Smith *stop* her Heavenly procession to urge her former *husband*, Frank to *join* her *joyful* journey. But, while Frank *considered* surrendering to Sarah, a *bigger* part of him focused on winning *her sympathy* through *self-pity* – illustrating Frank's *struggle* to pick his *path*. And *that's* where we pick up *our story*, **deciding our destiny**. And the choice *hasn't* changed since Moses said:

See, I have set before you today life and good, **or** death and evil, in that I *command* you today to love the LORD your God, to *walk* in His ways ... that you may live ... in the land which you go to possess. – Deuteronomy 30:15-16 NKJ

But even *though* life and death are in our hands, did you catch what *actually determines* our decision? **Our decision isn't between life and death or good and evil – those are consequences of our choice.** And we *don't* decide *those* – *reality* does. For *example*, I can't *choose* to be *rich* – *that's* a *consequence* of choice. But I *can* choose to *work, sacrifice*, and *focus* on finances so *that* the *consequence* of my choice is *wealth*. Because **we decide our actions but truth decides our consequences.** We *can* choose to board a bus, but we *don't* decide where it goes. Because we *accept* its *destination* as a *consequence* of our *choice*. And Moses said the *destinations* of life or death are set before us "**in that**" we can choose our *actions* – whether to *love God* and *walk* in His ways – *or not!* *That's* the decision that *does* decide our destiny. Cuz, in the end, **only love leads to life**; while **anything else leads everywhere else.** And the truth is, everywhere *other* than *life and good*, is *death and evil*. It's *either/or*.

So, the big question of the *week*, of this *series*, and of our *lives* is this: **Where are you headed?** And since our *answer* is determined by our *actions*, perhaps the *better* question is **how are you living?** Cuz *this life* alerts us to the *actual aim* of our *heart* – before our *choice* takes us to its *destination*.

And that's why Sarah is so set on changing *Frank's* heart as we rejoin the story in chapter 13. Frank has been letting his *own* alter-ego, the Dramatic Actor, live *more and more of his life* – and because the *Tragedian* is focused on emotionally *manipulating* others to love *him* through *self-pity* and *sympathy*, **Frank's life is less and less focused on the True Love that would lead him to real life.** But as Sarah *pleads* with him to *choose* emotional *fulfilment* over emotional *blackmail*, Frank lets his *Tragedian* keep up the dramatic *defense* while *he* grows *smaller and smaller* until he *disappears*. And after Frank shrank *too small* to be *seen*, Sarah *stands* and resumes her *joyful* journey to Heaven. And this prompts Lewis to *challenge* his Guide – asking why *she* and other Solid Spirits don't go down to the Grey Town to *help* – if *their* love is *so pure*. And MacDonald *answers* by *explaining* what just happened; **Frank wasn't just shrinking, he was returning to Grey Town.** And as they *bend down*, MacDonald points to a tiny *crack* in the dirt and says *that's* where they *came from*.



**'But, I saw an infinite abyss. And cliffs towering up and up. And then *this* country on top of the cliffs.' 'Aye ...That bus, and all you inside it, were increasing in size.' 'Do you mean then that Hell—all that infinite empty town—is down in some little crack like *this*?' 'Yes. All Hell is smaller than one pebble of your *earthly* world [and] smaller than one atom of this *Real* World.' 'It seems *big enough* when you're in it, Sir.'**

True. But **anything seems big when it's all we can see.** And *that's* why it's *foolish* to judge the *infinite* and *eternal* Heaven from our *finite* and *temporary* perspective. And it's why *Sarah*, and every other Christian who's met Jesus *ought* to be eager to *expand* our earthly *perception*; and to *explain* that **the pains of our earthly limitations are meant to raise our expectations of Heaven, not lower them:**

[The way Paul says] We do not lose heart. Though *outwardly* [in our *earthly* selves] we are wasting away, yet *inwardly* [in our *spiritual* selves] we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles [down here] are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is *seen* is temporary, but what is *unseen* is eternal. – 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 NIV

It's *not* just a state of *mind*, Hell *does* exist – but, like the *earth*, **it's just so insignificant when compared to the infinite reality of Heaven, that it barely exists.** And it's barely *noticeable* when buried *beneath* the experience of *consuming* joy. Like the *hangnail* you *forget to feel* when you win the *lottery* – or the *labor pains* that *fade* into memory as you *feel* the *love* of *holding* your newborn. But, even *after* explanations, Lewis *struggles* to understand how *everything* he's seen is the best way for a *loving* God to save *His* kids. So, in our *last* chapter, MacDonald shows him a huge chessboard surrounded by *spiritual* beings moving their *human* pieces to *simplify* the metaphor.



**'Is that the truth? Is all that I have been seeing in *this* country false?' 'Do not ask of a vision in a dream more than a vision in a dream can give.' 'A dream? Then, am I *not* really here, Sir?' 'No, Son, it is not so good as *that*... Ye are only dreaming. And if ye come to tell of what ye have seen, make it plain that it was but a dream. Give no poor fool the pretext to think ye are claiming knowledge of what no mortal knows.'**

**Because no mortal does know!** Let me be *clear*: *authors* don't know, *scholars* don't know, and *pastors* don't know the *full nature* of the *reality* that *awaits*. We're not *equipped* with the ability to *perceive* the life we *can't* see. But *that's* by design – because **life isn't about Heaven and Hell, it's about love and God**. And we *are equipped* with the ability to *perceive* the *love* we can't see.

No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and *His love* is made complete *in us*. ... And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. [Cuz] God is love. [So,] Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. – 1 John 4:12, 16 NIV

Through each *other*, we can *know* love; and by *knowing* love we can *know* God. So, **to love or not to love – that is the question!** And **our life is our answer**. And Lewis's *last* picture is meant to illustrate *that* point; our souls *can exist* in a higher reality *outside* time – but only *when* they *join* in the *love* that holds *perfection* together.



So our souls are given *this* life – *inside* time (*on the chessboard*), – **to teach our inmost nature to choose love**, while *shielding* us from the eternal *consequences* of a *wrong* choice. Just like a dream. Cuz, in a dream, I can learn how *awful* bad choices – *like murder* – *feel*, but then *wake up* with *real convictions* to avoid the *real consequences*. So, no wonder Lewis *ends* his story by *waking up* back in his study before getting to see the *reality* of Heaven. Cuz it's a reminder that the *metaphor* ends, but our *real* journey *continues*. **The dream is a wake-up call to evaluate our lives** and *choose* to *live out* the love that *leads* to God. Cuz *who* we *love* guides *how* we *live*.

[And, in the end] No one can serve two masters. Either you will *hate* the one and *love* the other, or you will be *devoted* to the one and *despise* the other.– Matthew 6:24 NIV

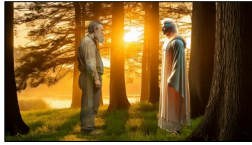
And *that's* been the *theme* since the start because *that's* the *core* message of our book; **it's God or us!** We gotta choose *our* way or *His* way. And because our *heart* makes the choice, **we gotta learn to love the Lord!** Which *should* be easy – cuz He's the Creator of the universe and yet *His* greatest desire is to *share* everything *with us*! But as this *book* has been illustrating, **we confuse His care for His control!** Because we *can't* survive *alone*, but when *He* offers help – we *feel* we're *not free*, and do everything we *can* to *hold on* to our authority – even if it looks as stupid as Frank *rejecting* pure joy!

And *that's* why Lewis portrayed Hell as the Grey Town – it's a place of eternal unfulfillment *because* it's a place of *rejecting* God's help. So don't get the wrong idea – it's *not* a real *town*, there is no bus to *heaven*, and no Ghosts living in *ghost houses*. **But Hell is a place of eternal torment because it is eternally separated from the satisfaction that only God can provide!** It's the *torture* of *thirst* while separated from *water*, or *hunger* while separated from *food*. It is the feeling of *burning* with desire for *something* eternally out of reach. *It's Hell!* But *here's* the good news: **It's our choice!**

And in *The Great Divorce*, *that's* what C.S. Lewis is trying to communicate: **Hell doesn't hold on to us we hold on to Hell!** Our self-serving *sin* finds a way to subtly *reject* God's authority or *retain* our own – but *either way*, it keeps us from *receiving* what we *need* by keeping *our hands* on the wheel. So, Lewis gave us a cast of *characters* to help *us* identify the subtle ways we keep *ourselves* as our *master* when we, like Frank, need to **let go of the chain and choose God**. So, who hit *you* the hardest? *Who* highlights the sin *you* most struggle to *release* before you can *receive* God's guidance.



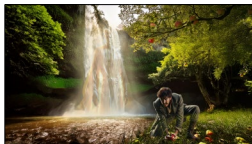
Was it **the Bus Stop Ghosts**, who grew *accustomed* to their *unfulfilling* lives, because the daily routine of *anger, pride, lust, or greed* was so *familiar* – that the sin felt more *comforting* than *convicting*? Then look *closer* – and **admit the daily comfort of false freedom hurts more than the pain of Godly change.**



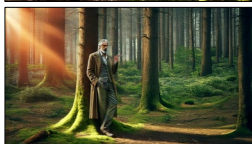
Or was it **The Big Ghost**, *outraged* by Heaven's mercy toward a *murderer* because he *couldn't* see past what *he* thought was *right*. Then maybe you need to **surrender your self-righteousness by practicing trust in God's justice.**



Perhaps it was **The Intellectual Ghost**, because you *too* find yourself talking *about* God more than talking to Him. If so, **challenge yourself to listen more than you speak and be sure the only approval you seek, is God's.**



Did you identify with Ikey, **The Apple Ghost**, because you try to fit God into your earthly life instead of the other way around? Well, then you know **you gotta get intentional about putting material things in God's hands.**



Or, like me, do you see **The Hard-Bitten Ghost** in your actions, because your cynicism has a way of obstructing your faith by elevating your voice above others? **Then it's time to focus on vulnerability over self-preservation.**



Maybe it's **The Well-Dressed Ghost's** *vanity* that you struggle to let go – and you need to **surround yourself with Godly words to drown out your own as you learn to discern who has the influence God wants to give.**



Was it **The Overbearing Ghost**, whose love for her husband was tainted by her selfish need to control? Then take this week to find opportunities to **surrender your will to someone else – as an act of God's outward love.**



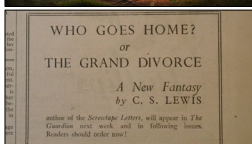
I know *a lot of us* identify with **The Motherly Ghost**, who *contaminated* her love of a child with her *possessiveness*. If *that's* you, grow your faith by **letting go of your will for others and truly trusting they're better off in God's hands.**



Or did **The Oily Ghost** and his **Lust Lizard** convict you *most*, by reflecting the way you excuse the *earthly* experiences you lust after? Then like *him*, **summon the courage to ask God to take it from you once and for all, despite the pain!**



Or was it **Frank, The Dwarf Ghost and his Tragedian** whose *desire for love* had twisted into an *addiction* to self-pity and emotional *manipulation*? If so, **stop asking for sympathy and start sharing selflessly; giving love makes more!** Y'know, Lewis originally titled this story *Who Goes Home* because we *all* want to *be* the answer to *that* question. But as the book reveals, such an *important* question *doesn't* have an *easy* answer. It requires *deep, deliberate, honest, and open examination*. So, **where are you headed?**



Every Ghost thought *they* were headed in the right direction, but *sin* subtly *distorted* their perspective. **How about you?** Well, good thing you don't need to see where you're going! *That's God's job!* All we gotta do to *get* there is let go of *ourselves* and get on board with *God* – and coming here has already taken you *halfway* home! So why not stick around and see where you go next?

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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.