

## Introduction

Character matters.<sup>1</sup> It mattered greatly to C.S. Lewis.<sup>2</sup> He knew that character is at the core of what it means to be human. Our character is who we are. It is vital to sustaining our vocation in life. Failure to be of good character can have devastating consequences for ourselves and others. The Church, the government, agencies responsible for law and order, business, the media and schooling are all coming to realise a hard truth: the cost of neglecting character formation is very high.

We must ask ourselves honestly: How well do we foster the growth of virtue? C.S. Lewis believed that, in his own day, character was given far too little attention. If he were alive today, we believe he would see an even more urgent need. This book draws on his timeless wisdom about what character is, why it matters in every area of life and, most important, how we as adults can go about building good character in our children.<sup>3</sup>

C.S. Lewis is best known as the author of *The Chronicles of Narnia*<sup>4</sup> and *Mere Christianity* and most people do not realise that he also made a compelling contribution to the education of character.<sup>5</sup> The first chapter of his book *The Abolition of Man*<sup>6</sup> is entitled 'Men without Chests' because the heads (intellects) of people looked much bigger than their chests (their character). He perceived the 'atrophy of the chest'<sup>7</sup> as character wasted away through lack of exercise.

Practice and exercise establish good habits or 'virtues' which help us make good choices. Our choices are derived from who we are, and they determine who we become. C.S. Lewis reminds us that when we speak of 'a good tennis player', we mean someone whose 'eye and muscles and nerves have been so trained by making innumerable good shots that they can now be relied on'.<sup>8</sup>

'Moral muscle' is much the same. The person 'who perseveres in doing just actions', Lewis pointed out, 'gets in the end a certain quality of character'.<sup>9</sup> In *Mere Christianity* C.S. Lewis put it this way:

Every time you make a choice you are turning the central part of you, the part of you that chooses, into something a little different from what it was before.<sup>10</sup>

Each of us, through the choices we make each day, is ultimately responsible for that ‘central part’ of us. When it comes to our choices, motives matter too. Why we do what we do determines whether our choices are even virtuous at all. As C.S. Lewis pointed out: ‘Right actions done for the wrong reasons do not help to build the internal quality of character called a “virtue”, and it is this quality of character that really matters.’<sup>11</sup>

As a Christian, C.S. Lewis had an ultimate reason to lead a life of virtue, a perfect model (Jesus) for doing so, help (God’s grace) in choosing good and resisting evil, and forgiveness when he failed. Later in this book, we take a closer look at C.S. Lewis’ faith, for Christians are instructed in the New Testament: ‘add to your faith virtue’ (II Peter 1:5).

However, like C.S. Lewis, we believe character is important for everyone, everywhere. He acknowledged that virtues are taught across diverse faiths and cultures. In Part 1 of this book we draw upon works by C.S. Lewis that are relevant to parenting and schooling, the influence of friends and peer culture, the media and technology, and how all of these factors affect the development of a person’s character.<sup>12</sup> Remarkably, C.S. Lewis wrote about how we can build good character and also wrote stories that illustrate such character development. In Parts 2 and 3, we give examples from *The Chronicles of Narnia* that show how we can grow in character.

### **The Education of Character in the World of Narnia**

*Narnian Virtues* began as a research project, generously funded by the Templeton Foundation, which ran over four years with children, young people, parents, teachers and leaders in the United States, Britain, the Republic of Ireland, the Netherlands, Germany, Cambodia, Mexico and Turkey.<sup>13</sup>

The Narnia stories have enduring appeal and continue to be hugely popular with children and families. In the course of selling more than 100 million copies, the Narnia stories have been translated into 47 languages. *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*<sup>14</sup> is on *Time* magazine’s list of the 100 best books for young adults<sup>15</sup> (though many adults enjoy it too) and was

selected by the Book Trust<sup>16</sup> as one of the best books for eleven year-olds.

Three of the Narnia stories – *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, *Prince Caspian*, and *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*<sup>17</sup> – have been made into popular feature-length films. Recently, Netflix and Entertainment One, noting that generations of readers have ‘fallen in love with characters like Aslan and the entire world of Narnia’, announced that they will be ‘translating the Narnian universe into feature-length and episodic programming for years to come’.<sup>18</sup>

Narnia is a world where moral choices matter. Good choices have good consequences; bad choices, bad ones. Virtues and vices are dramatically depicted. We are attracted to the one and repelled by the other. In the Narnia novels, events turn on whether and how the characters in the stories enact – or fail to enact – crucial qualities of character. In some of the stories, characters who are selfish at the outset experience character transformation as they learn hard lessons and come to realise their flaws and failings. In some cases, they rise to heroism. In all cases, their journeys offer lessons about character that we can apply to our own lives and be better as a result.

This book will help readers understand why the Narnian virtues of love, wisdom, justice, self-control, integrity and fortitude are objectively good human qualities – good for our flourishing as individuals and good for the flourishing of society. Furthermore, we will show how to nurture these essential human qualities in our young.

Good stories stay in the moral memory and have the capacity to motivate us to practise virtue. That is important as human beings tend to have problems with motivation. Inspiring stories of virtue motivate us and help us empathise with others and learn from the consequences of their actions. We chose the Narnia novels because it is more important than ever to nourish our minds, hearts and souls on a diet of wholesome and inspiring literature rather than on fiction of questionable quality. ‘If you don’t read good books’, C.S. Lewis wisely observed, ‘you will read bad ones.’<sup>19</sup> These days, some books aimed at young readers have characters, plots, messages and language that are not supportive of the values that wise parents may be trying to instil at home.

We believe that books can and should depict both good and evil, but in ways that do not blur the difference and provide a

balanced and hopeful vision of the good of which human beings are capable. Historically, good literature, especially fiction for the young, has done that by presenting virtue as attractive – and possible.<sup>20</sup> C.S. Lewis has a special genius for making virtue attractive and also for showing how we can cultivate the virtues that constitute good character.

Although we discuss all seven of the Narnia novels, as well as drawing on C.S. Lewis' wisdom concerning character formation found in his letters, articles and books, we provide specific suggestions in this book for getting the most out of two novels in particular. *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* offer some of the most memorable and teachable character-moments in *The Chronicles of Narnia* series.

In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, Peter, Susan and Lucy begin by caring about themselves and how to get their wayward brother, Edmund, back, but they soon take on a bigger mission: liberating the land of Narnia from tyranny. Edmund's character transformation is dramatic: soon after entering Narnia he deserts his siblings to join the Witch but ends up fighting with them for Narnia's freedom and playing a vital role defeating her in battle.

In *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, the young King Caspian, accompanied by Edmund, Lucy, Eustace, their cousin from Cambridge, and Reepicheep, the valiant mouse, pursue a just quest to find the seven lost lords and explore the world's end. On the way, they abolish the slave trade and have many other adventures. We witness Eustace being turned into a dragon, having a profound change of heart, being turned back into a boy by Aslan and his resulting transformation of character.

### **The Narnian Virtues Approach**

The *Narnian Virtues* approach enables readers to see the *relevance* of situations in the novel to situations in their own life.<sup>21</sup> It prompts them to *apply* lessons learned from the characters in the story to their own character. As they read the Narnia stories, they learn to write a better script and live out a better story.

The episodes (such as 'Turkish Delight') that we focus on in this book are readily accessible in the movie versions and can be used in a wide variety of contexts – schools, churches, youth groups, summer camps, holiday clubs, prisons and the like, wherever people are committed to building good character.

Just one example from *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* will serve to whet the appetite for what is to come – and to show how we enable readers, young and old, to see the relevance of different episodes to their own character development.

In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, shortly after Lucy, the youngest of the four Pevensie siblings, enters the world of Narnia, her older brother Edmund stumbles into it and finds himself confronted by the terrifying White Witch in her great sledge. In order to get Edmund to divulge what she wants to know about his siblings, the Witch magically produces for him a box of enchanted Turkish Delight. The more he eats of it, the more he wants.

As he shovels down the Turkish Delight as fast as he can, he mindlessly tells the Queen everything she wants to know. He pleads with the Queen for more but she says that first he must bring his three siblings to her. He continues to think only about how she will give him more Turkish Delight. Finally, Edmund sneaks away from the cosy home of Mr and Mrs Beaver, where the others are warm and dry and enjoying a delicious home-cooked meal, and finds himself trudging through the darkness, cold and wet, where Lewis tells us the ‘silence and loneliness were dreadful’. Edmund ends up utterly miserable in the service of the Witch but is rescued, only just in time, from being murdered by her with the stone knife she uses on Aslan.<sup>22</sup>

In our *Narnian Virtues* research, after reading this episode, children and young people were asked ‘What is your “Turkish Delight”?’ We explained that ‘Turkish Delight’ served as a metaphor for anything attractive that threatened to undermine their self-control. Twelve-year-old ‘Heather’, struck by Edmund’s ‘addiction’ and out-of-control behaviour, realised that *her* Turkish Delight was her smart phone, because she felt great peer-pressure to be constantly available online, at all hours of the day and night. Her friends expected it of her. It is a familiar problem – and not just for children.<sup>23</sup>

Heather admitted her addiction to her mother, who then worked with her to limit her time online for a period. ‘It was the right thing to do’, Heather says. ‘Before that, I was so worried I forgot to eat.’ She told her friends she would not be available after a certain time in the evening and left her smart phone downstairs instead of taking it up to her bedroom. Today, far too many people are afraid they will miss out (or be left out)

and, as a result, they spend far too much time online. Indeed, recent research finds that the more social media platforms teenagers use, the more likely they are to suffer from anxiety and depression.<sup>24</sup>

We realise, of course, that some people, young or old, may not be attracted to working on their character. 'I can't be *bothered* to work on my character', one twelve year-old in our project was heard to say to a friend. To some children being 'good' may seem boring and being 'bad' exciting. Devin Brown shows how C.S. Lewis changes that perception by giving us characters who pursue virtue – and have the time of their lives doing so:

Lewis wants to point out that the self-centered life is not cool or fun, he also wants to say that the virtuous life, the courageous, wise, faithful, resolute, unselfish life lived by the good characters in Narnia, is not dull or dreary. The virtuous life is a real adventure.<sup>25</sup>

We get to go places we would not be able to go to without character. We get to tackle tough challenges, defend what's right, fight for what's just and not avoid difficulties or take the easy way out. Readers can learn that when we build character, we live life to its full, the way it is meant to be lived. We have a real adventure.

The Narnia novels enable us to enter an imaginary world and, vicariously, to experience what characters in the story undergo there, learn from those experiences, and then carry that learning with us when we return to our real world. Our friend Pete, a captain on multi-engine jets, who teaches others to fly them, says that the days he spends in 'the Sim' (his flight simulator) give him experience in a concentrated form that would take him years to get in the air. Good books do the same for us. We can travel anywhere without moving an inch; we can be, as C.S. Lewis said, 'a thousand people while remaining ourselves'.<sup>26</sup>

In our real world, we can draw upon the insights gained in the world of the story. A whole range of options and opportunities open up to us with good character that are denied otherwise. In our *Narnian Virtues* research project we provided a Character Passport (of different virtues to 'visit', each of which gets 'stamped' when practised). We explained that we get to travel further in life when we are practising the virtues.

## Benefits of Building Good Character

Good character enables a student to attain a personal best at school. Think about it. If students are punctual, hard-working, determined and resilient, they will do better than if they are late, lazy and give up easily. Consider a child who may be struggling at school. What will determine the outcome of that struggle? Does the student have a good attitude? Enough humility to be teachable? A good work ethic? Perseverance when something is difficult? Not surprisingly, research tells us:

Character education has been demonstrated to be associated with academic motivation and aspirations, academic achievement, prosocial behaviour, bonding to school, pro-social and democratic values, conflict-resolution skills, moral-reasoning maturity, responsibility, respect, self-efficacy, self-control, self-esteem, social skills, and trust in and respect for teachers.<sup>27</sup>

In our highly competitive world, we can easily get the idea that you need to be ruthless to survive and succeed. However, exactly the opposite turns out to be true. A few years ago, Harvard Business Review Press published *Return on Character* by Fred Kiel, one of the top leadership consultants to Fortune 500 companies. Based on his seven-year study of more than 100 CEOs, Kiel found that leaders with strong moral character achieved, for their companies, up to five times greater 'return on assets' than leaders who rated low on moral character.

It was the interpersonal virtues like patience, humility and forgiveness that differentiated the most successful company leaders from the less successful ones, not the performance virtues like drive, determination and resilience (all the CEOs had those).<sup>28</sup> In *Good to Great*, Jim Collins reports that the most successful CEOs have a blend of 'personal humility and professional will' and words like 'humble', 'modest', 'self-effacing' and 'gracious' characterise such leaders.<sup>29</sup>

Other best-selling books have the same message. Daniel Goleman's *Emotional Intelligence* reported the growing evidence that 'EQ' – qualities like self-awareness, ability to manage your emotions and to get along with other people – is more important than IQ, both in relationships and on the job.<sup>30</sup> Stephen Covey's *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* maintains that moral character, not personality, is the key to a happy and flourishing life.<sup>31</sup>

Character is good for whole communities, too. Character helps us to be better mothers and fathers, sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, employees and employers, citizens and community members. Nevertheless, it does not happen overnight. Our character is always a 'work in progress'. When we practise a virtue with a high degree of consistency, we have established it as a fairly dependable habit. As we strive to develop our character, our challenge is to make progress – to practise the virtues more consistently, acknowledge when we don't and keep on trying to improve. We all make mistakes; we all often act in ways that are not our best. We are all in this together.

In short, the Narnian virtues are good for everyone: business CEOs, school leaders, church leaders, parents, teachers, adults, young people and children from a wide range of backgrounds. Whatever your previous experience with the Narnia stories, this book shows how to develop good character as we engage with them, apply their lessons and practise the Narnian virtues.

### **A Virtues Vocabulary Helps to Build Character**

Studies have also confirmed the benefits of developing a 'virtues vocabulary'. Children, who initially did not have a way of talking meaningfully about their own character, once they acquire a virtues vocabulary, cherish it and enjoy the opportunity to use it.<sup>32</sup> We have included a Virtues Vocabulary (Appendix A) at the end of this book which draws on our experience of seeing a dramatic increase in children's virtue literacy.<sup>33</sup> Being able to use the language of virtue in their lives is an ethically empowering experience and can actually be fun. Says 'Jennifer': 'Before Narnia, I didn't have a clue about what vices and virtues were. But reading about the characters, you're like, "Oh, what virtue is that character showing?" It's quite fun to think about it.'

We have found that children can be surprisingly forthcoming and humble in their self-reflections as they read and discuss a Narnia story. When they see a fault, such as Edmund's lying to his siblings, glaringly displayed in the novel, they may recognise the same fault in themselves and resolve to do better. Says 'Andy': 'Edmund showed deceit by lying to his siblings. I've shown deceitfulness by lying – I blamed it on someone else.'

A thirteen-year-old girl, from a Christian home, explained to

us that she related to the Pevensie siblings who do not always see Aslan but trust him nevertheless:

I can't really see God. I see his work in other people's lives but I can't see him physically, you know, in the room. He's not a visible person and it's very difficult to hear him with everything going on around you. You've got to, you know, make time to connect with him.

One thirteen-year-old boy, who aspired to be like Aslan because he was 'calm and truthful', observed, 'I believe if everyone was like Aslan it would be a better world.'

This book shows how we can make the Narnian virtues – the character qualities exhibited in the stories – become more a part of our real-life, day-to-day relationships. When adults and children talk about virtue and then begin using the language of virtue to talk about other real-life situations, our research finds that everyone benefits. In the interviews we've conducted with parents, they say their relationships with their children have become more open, cooperative and generally positive.<sup>34</sup> Children become more self-aware and self-controlled when they are trying to improve in the virtues; so do adults. One mother, comments on her family's experience: 'It's opened new lines of communication with our daughter. She's much more open now about things that are bothering her and things she could do better.'

And here's a dad: 'Because life's so busy, having these conversations about the virtues has been like pressing the pause button. You get to say, "Let's all have a think about this." It helps you to ask as a whole family, "Where can we all improve?"'

### Some Introductions

Most introductions to C.S. Lewis record that he was Fellow and Tutor in English Literature at Magdalen College, Oxford University until 1954 when he became Professor of Medieval and Renaissance Literature at Magdalene College, Cambridge University, a position he held until just before his death in 1963, on the same day that President John F. Kennedy was assassinated.

Such introductions often note that C.S. Lewis was what today we call a 'thought leader', that his face appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine<sup>35</sup> and he is usually acknowledged as the twentieth century's most influential apologist for the Christian faith, with millions having read his book *Mere Christianity*.<sup>36</sup> However, what

such introductions do not recognise is that his contributions to these different fields come together in his understanding of character.

While applying C.S. Lewis' wisdom to twenty-first-century concerns, this book shows how his literary scholarship, fiction and Christian apologetics, taken together, shed light on the importance (and neglect) of character in many educational as well as Christian contexts.

To be a best-selling author, a public intellectual, a national and international figure in the media and a famous Christian apologist would be remarkable enough. What most people do not realise, however, is that C.S. Lewis' wisdom about character has been confirmed by recent research – which we draw upon in the chapters that follow. This book shows how character is a central, albeit largely unrecognised, thread that runs through the rich tapestry of C.S. Lewis' academic, literary and Christian works.

You might wonder how we came to write a book about teaching character through C.S. Lewis' Narnia stories. First of all, we're both Christian husbands and fathers who have taught character in secular as well as Christian contexts. Mark and his wife have three children (two of whom are currently teenagers); Tom and his wife have two grown sons and many grandchildren. The Narnia stories were a significant part of our own lives as parents and grandparents before we even thought about this book. We both share the moral purpose of helping young people develop good character and challenge adults (parents, teachers and leaders) to model and foster good character.

Mark has a Ph.D. in education from Southampton University in England, with a specialisation in English literature in education, a master's degree in leadership and learning, a UK teacher's qualification from Nottingham University and a first degree in literature and religion from the University of Leeds. His most recent books are *Mere Education* (translated into Dutch and Korean) and *Ethical English*. He served as Professor of Education at the University of Leeds in England where he was the Head of the School of Education for several years before becoming CEO of Emmanuel Schools Foundation, a group of 'Christian-Ethos Schools of Character for the Whole Community', providing full-time education for around 8,000 children aged four to nineteen in the North of England. Mark led and directed the character education project *Narnian Virtues* and speaks internationally on

C.S. Lewis, education and the schooling of character. He has been married to Babs for almost 30 years and they have lived in Yorkshire, England for the last 20 of those years.

Tom has a PhD in psychology from the State University of New York in the United States, with a specialisation in the character development of children and teenagers and a master's degree in literature. He has been Visiting Professor at Harvard and Boston universities. For the past four decades, as a developmental psychologist and Professor of Education at the State University of New York at Cortland, he has helped to launch and lead the American character education movement. He founded and continues to direct the Center for the 4th and 5th Rs (Respect and Responsibility) ([www.cortland.edu/character](http://www.cortland.edu/character)). His books on character development have been translated into a dozen languages and include the popular *Raising Good Children*, *Educating for Character*, *Character Matters*, and, most recently, *How to Raise Kind Kids: And Get Respect, Gratitude, and a Happier Family in the Bargain*.<sup>37</sup> He speaks to parents and schools around the world on teaching kindness, respect and other virtues. Tom and his wife, Judy, have been married for more than 50 years and, with their friend William Boudreau, MD, wrote a book for teenagers, *Sex, Love, and You: Making the Right Decision*.<sup>38</sup>

We crossed paths at a character education conference a decade ago in Washington, DC, and began sharing the work we were doing. Mark proposed drawing upon C.S. Lewis' Narnia novels in a character education project prompted by his realisation that the contribution of C.S. Lewis to character development had been largely neglected.<sup>39</sup> Mark invited Tom to join him in helping young people to apply C.S. Lewis' insights to their own character development. This book is the fruit of that collaboration. We hope it will help you understand and apply C.S. Lewis' wisdom and storytelling to the task of supporting our children's development of good character.