

# From observation to experience (John 14:1-14)

## C. S. Lewis's wisdom on looking along a beam of light, not at it

by [Jared E. Alcántara](#)

May 5, 2023

To receive these posts by email each Monday, [sign up](#).

For more commentary on this week's readings, see the [Reflections on the Lectionary](#) page. For full-text access to all articles, [subscribe](#) to the Century.

Some time ago, I read a short essay written by C. S. Lewis in 1945 called "Meditation in a Toolshed."

Lewis tells the story of entering a toolshed and coming upon a beam of light shining through the otherwise darkened room. At first, he looked at the beam more as an abstraction than as a reality. He studied its features, observed the specks of dust floating through it.

But then he had an idea. Rather than looking at the light, he stepped into it. To paraphrase his essay, he looked *along* the beam instead of looking *at* the beam.

When he did so, he was transported. Not only did he see the shed differently, but he saw other things differently as well. He could see outside: the leaves on the branches, the blue sky beyond the door, even the sun off in the distance. When he experienced the beam rather than just observing it, it changed his whole perspective.

We do not need to do much to engage in detached observation or distant speculation. It is quick and easy to look at the beam. Perhaps we have become quite

adept at the task. But this is not what Jesus is asking us to do when he says, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” Too many of us hear him say these words with sternness in his voice. What he says here is, in context, far more hopeful.

We come to him to know *about* the way, and he says to us: *I am the way*. We come to him to know *about* the truth, and he answers us: *I am the truth*. We come to him to know *about* life, and he tells us: *I am the life*. Without apology he beckons us away from detachment or distance: *If you really want to find the way to life, find your way to me*.

What if we looked *along* the beam, stepped into it, experienced it? No doubt we would see God’s light in a new way and appreciate God’s beauty more than we do now. But it would also change our perspective on our world—which, by the way, God loves far more than we do. If we looked along the beam, it would help us see and love the blue sky beyond the door.