

Introduction: A Parental Shift from Alarm to Approval

What initially concerned John Granger about the Harry Potter books so much that he wouldn't allow his children to read them? What in his background allowed him to look beyond the "witchcraft trees" and see the "spiritual forest" of these books?

If many Christians have misunderstood the Harry Potter books, though they have done so because of their desire not to violate biblical admonitions against sorcery, are they guilty of a lack of charity? If not, could their reading of these books be a support to their faith? If they have been uncharitable, what is their appropriate change of course?

Chapter 1: Magic, Fantasy, and the Christian Worldview

Explain the difference between incantational magic and invocational magic.

Do scriptural warnings about magic, invocational sorcery, and incantational spellwork apply to literature or just to real-world occult practice? In what sense can positive or negative portrayals of magic foster or immunize against interest in the occult arts?

Chapter 2: God's Army versus the Servants of Satan?

What is the key difference between the choices made by the Gryffindor good guys and the Slytherin bad guys in the Harry Potter books? How does this parallel the challenge of living a life of service to God in a secular, fallen world?

How does a story of good versus evil help us, if it does help us, make difficult choices in our daily life? What did C. S. Lewis mean when he wrote that the best books "train us in the stock responses" and that the Great Books "instruct while delighting"?

Chapter 3: The Hero's Christlike Journey

What journey elements are found in every Harry Potter book (i.e., starting point, conflict, crisis, etc.)? In what ways is the author using a writing formula?

Every Harry Potter book's crisis has Harry dying a figurative death and rising from death in the presence of a symbol of Christ. Discuss the possible relationship of this formula element and the popularity of the Harry Potter books even in non-Christian cultures.

Chapter 4: The Alchemy of Spiritual Growth

Why are alchemy and its many images and symbols such a large part of the English literary tradition? Review the ways J. K. Rowling follows traditional usage in her symbols and story lines about alchemy and human change.

In what sense do the three stages of the alchemical work parallel the stages of growth in the Christian life? Can reading books with alchemical backdrops foster a more human life? In what ways could it hinder it?

Chapter 5: One Person, Two Natures

In the fifth Harry Potter book, Albus Dumbledore uses explicitly Christian language to discern and describe the shared natures and essential differences between Harry Potter and the villain of the books, Lord Voldemort. In what way does this point to the Christian meaning of the books, and in what way is it exactly the opposite of the Christian understanding of Christ having two natures and one essence?

In what sense are Frodo Baggins and Gollum, two hobbits in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, doppelgangers? If they are related in this way, what does it mean that Gollum dies in the end? Does this suggest a possible ending for the Harry Potter books? Is this the preferred end of the "old man" St. Paul points to that survives in all of us (Ephesians 4:22-24)?

Chapter 6: Christian Answers to Big Questions

What are the three tests of a Great Book? In what ways are these three elements common sense? Does J. K. Rowling pass the test with respect to the themes she explores in the Harry Potter novels?

In what ways does Rowling satirize the real world via the prejudices evident in almost every character in her magical sub-creation? What effect does a surprise ending have on a reader engrossed in a book?

Chapter 7: The Triumph of Love over Death

Rowling has said that the books are about death and bereavement. Review the answers she gives to the question of how we are to understand and attempt to transcend death. What solution does she offer in our flight from death (Voldemort)?

Rowling (via the wizard Albus Dumbledore) teaches Harry and us readers that there is a greater death than a physical death to be avoided at all costs. In what sense does her message conflict with the message we have from schools, media, and institutions? What role do literature and the arts have in helping us pursue life and flee the death of the soul?

Chapter 8: The Question of Identity:

How does Harry change in each of the books? What does Harry's learning in *Order of the Phoenix* that he has a destiny mean in terms of his day-to-day decision making? In what sense do you and I have a destiny and free will simultaneously?

Fate and free will are a central conflict in much of English literature. How does J. K. Rowling resolve this overarching question in human life? Is this the Christian answer to the question or a clever resolution of a non-problem? What would you answer if asked if men are free or destined to a certain fate?

Chapter 9: Evidence of Things Unseen

In what sense do literary or artistic symbols put us in touch with supernatural verities we cannot experience in themselves in this life? How does this differ from allegory? What scriptural support is there for understanding the world and man as symbol and image of supernatural reality?

Harry Potter sells well everywhere in the world, and many people who profess nothing but disdain or indifference to Christianity are powerfully moved and engaged by these stories that are laden with images and symbols of Christ. Explain possible reasons for Harry's popularity in light of images such as Harry's resurrection in each book.

Chapter 10: Fun with Names

What is a Dickensian cryptonym? Give a few examples of names with several layers of meaning in the Potter books, with special emphasis on the Potter and Malfoy families.

Harry Potter is less a name than a brand name now because of the successful marketing of the books, movies, and ancillary toys and products. If Harry Potter means "heir of the heavenly Father" as Granger suggests, does this mean he is a symbol of Christ or a Christian everyman? What would each mean for how we experience the story and identify with Harry?

Chapter 11: The Purification of the Soul (*Sorcerer's Stone*)

What is the meaning of the scene in the Forbidden Forest in which a character drinks the blood of the unicorn? Why is Harry the only character to face Voldemort/Quirrell before the Mirror of Erised? What protects him from the bad guy in the end? What is the lesson for us about the sameness and difference between heaven and hell in this ending?

Arthur Levine, the American publisher of the Harry Potter books, changed the title of the first book from *Philosopher's Stone* to *Sorcerer's Stone*. What difference, if any, might this have made in the reception of the books by Christian readers? Does it change the meaning of the books or just the popular perception of them?

Chapter 12: Dangerous Books and Edifying Books (*Chamber of Secrets*)

What are the three books called within *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*? What sort of books is Rowling telling us are dangerous compared to the edifying books she is writing? In what sense are her books a throwback to medieval morality plays and Passion dramas?

Explore the power of the dramatic battle between the phoenix and the basilisk in *Chamber of Secrets*. In what sense are we the readers meant to identify with both Harry and the young Tom Riddle in this battle? How does Harry vanquish Riddle—on his own or in consequence to his faith?

Chapter 13: Despair and Delivery (*Prisoner of Azkaban*)

What is the meaning of *Expecto Patronum*? In what ways is *Prisoner of Azkaban* about Harry's coming to a greater likeness of his biological father and his heavenly Father?

Harry has to learn the Patronus Charm in order to protect himself the dreaded dementors. These despair wraiths feed on his worst memories and suck the life and joy from him. What dementors do we experience in the larger, non-magical world, and what weapons have we been given to combat them? Does a good story help deflect a dementor or two?

Chapter 14: Girded with Virtue (*Goblet of Fire*)

What is the Goblet of Fire that chooses the champions who will compete in the Triwizard Tournament? In what sense is this novel an exterior novel rather than an interior one? What symbols of the Holy Trinity appear in Harry's duel with Lord Voldemort at book's end?

The rebirthing party in the graveyard at the end of *Goblet of Fire* is a complete inversion of Christian sacraments from baptism to burial. What is Rowling saying about the bad guys who take part in this ghoulish sacrilege, and what is she parodying in secular culture? Does Harry's triumph and escape from this evil have a lesson for each of us?

Chapter 15: Dark Night of the Soul (*Order of the Phoenix*)

In what ways is the very different seeming Harry Potter in the fifth book of the series much like the Harry Potter we met and grew to love in the first four books? How does he change in this book? In what several senses is this a dark or black book, alchemically speaking?

How does this book weave a spell like the Disillusionment Charm Alastor Moody puts on Harry in the first chapters of *Order of the Phoenix*? What, if any, relationship exists between the lack of coming-of-age rituals in the United Kingdom and the United States and the cool reception given this book by many Harry Potter fans? Rubeus Hagrid is perhaps the key supporting actor in this series; what lessons does his care for his brother teach us?

Chapter 16: The Power of Christian Artistry

What are the three main reasons for the Harry Potter books' popularity? Why are these reasons common sense, especially when contrasted with explanations that tell us the books and people who read them are bad or stupid? From what perspective are these books told? What effect does this perspective have on the experience of the story? What does Granger think will happen at the end of the series?

John Granger argues that the Harry Potter stories have their power from the degree to which each story reflects and suggests the Great Story of God's incarnation as Jesus of Nazareth. Is this a procrustean reach consequent to Granger's faith? Is it an argument according to design? If human beings are made "by Christ

for Christ,” and if all souls, as Tertullian said, are Christian souls, how does this strengthen or weaken Granger’s interpretation of the books?

Appendix: Speaking of God in Harry Potter

What are the three steps to building a house and building a relationship with your children so they can benefit from what you have to say about Harry Potter? How do you build their trust in your authority and their belief that you are a sympathetic fellow reader by taking this approach?

What are the differences, visible and invisible, between family time watching a movie or television and family time spent reading a book aloud? If the differences are striking, why aren’t you reading to your children and loved ones? Give it a try!