

*For my husband, Tom,
my treasured companion
for the journey*

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READ THIS FIRST

*“It’s a dangerous business, Frodo, going out of your door,”
he used to say. “You step into the Road, and if you
don’t keep your feet, there is no knowing where you
might be swept off to.”*

FRODO, QUOTING BILBO IN *The Fellowship of the Ring*,
BOOK ONE, CHAPTER THREE

If you prefer a safe, comfortable existence, by all means don’t read this book. Seriously. Shut it right now and step away.



On the other hand, if you're ready for a riotous romp through the uncharted territory over the Edge of the Wild, into the landscape of your own soul: GET READY. It's a dangerous business opening the pages of a book—even more dangerous than stepping out your front door. Your life may never be the same again.

Bilbo should know. Many decades before the events of *The Lord of the Rings*, when he was still considered a fairly “young” hobbit (midfifties!), adventure came—literally—knocking at his door. Not just any adventure, mind you, but a treasure hunt in which one of two outcomes was inevitable: (1) death, or (2) riches beyond his wildest dreams. Considering the odds, a “sensible” fellow would have stayed at home in his snug hobbit-hole. But Bilbo, in spite of himself, took the plunge, though he wasn't keen on it at first. Upon learning that the dwarves were preparing to leave without him, he ran out of the front door of Bag-End at a full sprint, and so begins the story known as *The Hobbit*.

We have much to learn from Bilbo. Who said

life was about being sensible and snug, anyway? Backpackers know you don't get the really cool views staying down in the valley, all cozy in your cabin. The unforgettable adventures with bears and eagles and (dare we say) *dragons* don't happen when you're cuddled up on the couch, snoozing in front of the fire, or sitting at the kitchen table, casually enjoying Second or Third Breakfast. You have to be willing to take the risk, pack your bags, hit the road, even miss a good meal or two, in order to have the kinds of experiences that will rock your world and change your life.

In short, you must be willing to set out on an *adventure*, not necessarily a real expedition involving maps and transportation and luggage and accommodations (though some of us are called to that kind of experience as well), but an inward journey of the soul. It's the kind that involves confronting your own weaknesses as well as strengths, going on when you're discouraged, telling the truth when you don't want to, taking responsibility for situations that require action, overcoming the greedy desire to have the coolest

stuff, and sticking to the wisest path in the midst of conflict. These experiences test the very foundation of what you believe about who you are. Not only that, but they test what you believe about the One who got you started on this adventure in the first place: God.

Simply put, God specializes in sending people on adventures. We see this throughout the Bible: We have Abram (Abraham) and Sarai (Sarah), instructed to pack up house and move to a foreign country. Then there's Joseph, sold into slavery by his brothers and sent to Egypt; and Moses, chosen by God to free the Hebrew slaves and take them to the Promised Land. Or Jonah, the guy who was swallowed by a great fish when he attempted to flee in the direction opposite what God had in mind. And we can't forget Paul who went on a spiritual quest of inner transformation before being sent to the far corners of the known world as the first Christian missionary.

Most important, we have Jesus himself, who was on the road continually throughout the years of his ministry. Right from the start, he hand-

selected a group of unlikely heroes for the expedition—disciples who left their safe, predictable existence in order to plunge over the Edge of the Wild. It's an invitation he extends to each of us today.

Faith is an ongoing adventure, not just a one-time choice: “The road goes ever on and on,” as Bilbo regularly reminded Frodo. Once we hear the knock on the door and step onto the road, there's no turning back. Life will never be the same again.

Are you ready for the adventure?

*Look! Here I stand at the door and knock.
If you hear me calling and open the door, I will come in,
and we will share a meal as friends.*

REVELATION 3:20



how to use this book

For those who first encountered Tolkien's imaginary world through *The Lord of the Rings*, reading *The Hobbit* is the next logical step in attempting to quench a thirst for more of Middle-earth. And it's much less involved! Tolkien originally wrote it as a children's story, so it's a quick, fun read. If you've never read it before, find a copy at your local bookstore or library, grab yourself a hot mug of tea, and settle in for an unforgettable



adventure. And if you *have* read it before, it wouldn't hurt to peruse it again as you dive into *Walking with Bilbo*.

As you read, give yourself time to reflect on Bilbo's journey from a spiritual perspective. That's where *Walking with Bilbo* comes in. It can help guide you in the process of reflection as it follows the basic outline of Bilbo's adventure from beginning to end. From a biblical perspective, it also explores the experiences of the disciples who set out on the adventure of faith with Jesus about two thousand years ago. While Tolkien clearly didn't intend direct parallels between Bilbo and those first Christians, we can see many of the same principles at work in their experiences—and in our own as disciples today.

Walking with Bilbo is created to be a devotional guide, which means there are short readings based on events in *The Hobbit*, followed by "Going Further" questions for reflection, and related Bible passages. You will want to (a) be familiar with *The Hobbit*, as already mentioned;

(b) grab a pen or pencil to jot down your thoughts for the “Going Further” questions; and (c) have a Bible handy (the New Living Translation is used for this book). If at times you can’t keep track of characters or places in Tolkien’s stories, there is a “Quick Reference Guide” in the back of this book.

It’s also essential to be familiar with the books or movies of *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, particularly *The Fellowship of the Ring*. There we see Bilbo many years after his adventures in *The Hobbit*; there too we see the inevitable results of his “accidental” finding of the Ring.

And finally, for a wonderful explanation from Gandalf’s point of view regarding his selection of Bilbo for the expedition to the Lonely Mountain, Tolkien’s tale “The Quest of Erebor” is also highly recommended.⁵

Thoughts to Get You Started

What lessons or opportunities would Bilbo have missed out on if he had decided to stay home instead of accepting the journey’s challenge?

What are some of the ways Bilbo's journey changed him?

How do you know when God is calling you to the adventure of faith? What does his "knock" sound like on the door of your soul? How do you hear his voice?

What does following Jesus look like today? How tempting is it to maintain a "safe, comfortable existence" rather than follow Jesus? What might someone miss out on if he or she doesn't choose to follow Jesus?

What are you going to do about it?



LOOKING FOR A FEW GOOD MEN (OR HOBBITS)

"I am looking for someone to share in an adventure that I am arranging, and it's very difficult to find anyone."

GANDALF, CHAPTER ONE OF *The Hobbit*

Remember those awful middle school gym classes when the teacher selected two captains and told them to take turns picking their teammates, one at a time? Either the captains' voices

were drowned by the clamoring throng (“Pick me! Pick me!”), or their words echoed in an uncomfortable silence (“I want her but not him; and you, over there—No, not *you*.”). Any twinge of sympathy for those left standing till the end was quickly overpowered by the extreme relief at not being one of them. How unfair it seems that certain people should be chosen (for some of the silliest reasons, too) while others aren’t!

Then of course, there’s the wretched classroom lecture scenario, usually involving a subject in which you feel hopelessly stupid. While the instructor paces around the podium, you sit quietly in your seat, trying not to move or sneeze or in any way draw attention to yourself. Because you know the firing squad of questions is coming. The instructor will wheel around suddenly and aim a zinger at some poor, unsuspecting student who may or may not have the fortitude to answer. And you hope it won’t be you. (*Please don’t pick me. PLEASE.*) How unfair it seems that

every student will be chosen at some point, including you!

Hmm. Interesting to compare the two scenarios, isn't it? In the first, you're desperate to get the attention of the person in charge rather than suffer the embarrassment of not being selected. In the second, you're desperate to stay under the radar altogether. But in both situations, you'll end up getting chosen eventually. The issue isn't whether or not you'll be chosen; the issue is *when*.

For Mr. Bilbo Baggins—who is about to be selected by one of the most famous captains in all literature—the time is *now*. Gandalf is in something of a hurry, and the little hobbit doesn't appear to be doing anything important at the moment. If he'd had his wits about him, Bilbo would've disappeared inside his hobbit-hole the minute he saw Gandalf coming. (*Please don't pick me. PLEASE.*) But besides being completely unaware of Gandalf's intentions, Bilbo is also—deep down—an adventurous fellow, though he doesn't realize it yet.

In fact, there are a great many things he doesn't realize, as Gandalf well knows. The wizard tells the dwarves, "There is a lot more in him than you guess, and a deal more than he has any idea of himself."⁶ Bilbo is being chosen precisely because Gandalf sees something in him that needs only the "chance to come out," and an adventure will do the job nicely. Despite Bilbo's protests—as well as those of the dwarves—he becomes the "chosen and selected burglar" for the expedition to the Lonely Mountain.

Chosen and selected. The words have a nice ring, don't they? They make us sit up a bit taller, lift our chins a little. Even if, like Bilbo, we're not sure what the words *mean* exactly, we rather like the idea of being handpicked for a purpose. It's not simply because we're susceptible to flattery, like the dragon, Smaug. Deep down we long to know that we have value and worth in someone's eyes, that someone thinks we have a role to play in the stories of our time.

And Someone does. The Creator of the

universe is also the Creator of every human life, including yours, and all that he does has a purpose. God made you for a reason and has a plan for your life. He's calling you to fulfill a purpose within a story that is larger than you could ever dream or imagine: an adventure beyond all adventures!

God had been in the business of hand-selecting people for specific jobs since the beginning of time. He cranked the recruitment process into high gear when Jesus came on the scene. Picture Peter with his brother Andrew, mending fishing nets on the shores of an inland sea. Peter doesn't have much in the way of education, nor is he what you might consider . . . um, shall we say, *prudent*. But Jesus says, "Come, be my disciples" (Matthew 4:19), and off he goes, Andrew at his side. Drop everything? Now? Okay. The rest of the twelve disciples have similar responses, and before long, voilà: you have an organized expedition.

Frankly, if you're really not interested in

adventures, it's wise to hide when you see Jesus coming. He has Gandalf-like tendencies that are really quite alarming. "Follow me," he says. "Take nothing for your journey. Go the extra mile. Why do you worry about what you will eat or what you will wear? Seek first God's kingdom." These are not safe words. At the very least, they could "make you late for dinner." In fact, they might mean you don't get any dinner at all.

But Jesus also says to his disciples, "You didn't choose me. I chose you" (John 15:16). This adventure of faith may appear to have a rather dubious origin and an even more dubious outcome, but that doesn't trump the fact that in this moment, in this hour, you are being called to walk with Jesus.

The question is, will you go?

*Long ago, even before he made the world, God loved
us and chose us in Christ.*

EPHESIANS 1:4

GOING FURTHER

- ⊕ What tasks have you been “chosen and selected” for? Why were you chosen?
- ⊕ How does it feel to be asked?
- ⊕ How does God view you? How easy or difficult is it to see yourself the way God sees you?
- ⊕ Why has God chosen and selected you for the adventure of faith?
- ⊕ What are you going to do about it?

THE WORD ON BEING CHOSEN

Take some time to read one or more of the following Bible passages:

Deuteronomy 7:6-8; Isaiah 6:8 and 41:9-10; Mark 2:13-17; Luke 6:12-16; James 2:5; 1 Peter 2:9

QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE

A Glossary of Terms Related to The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings

Arkenstone The greatest of the lost treasures of the dwarves, which they hope to recover in the expedition to the Lonely Mountain.

Bag-End Also known as The Hill: a cozy hobbit-hole in a hill; home to Bilbo Baggins and later to his heir, Frodo; located in the Shire.

Battle of Five Armies The climactic event of *The Hobbit*, in which men, elves, and dwarves are forced to unite against an attack of evil goblins and wargs (wolves).

Beorn A daunting man who can change into a bear. He becomes a “fierce friend” of Gandalf, Bilbo, and the dwarves.

Bilbo Baggins The unlikely hero of *The Hobbit*, the “chosen and selected burglar” who travels with a company of dwarves to steal back treasure from the dragon Smaug. See *Hobbits*.

Dark Lord See *Necromancer*.

Dragons Huge winged creatures from the North of Middle-earth that hoard treasure and destroy enemies with fire. See *Smaug*.

Dwarves Short manlike creatures, thirteen of which appear on Bilbo’s doorstep at the beginning of *The Hobbit*:

NOTES

Introduction

- ¹ C. S. Lewis, from the introduction to *Lilith* by George MacDonald (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1981), x–xi.
- ² See *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, edited by Humphrey Carpenter (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000), 288.
- ³ *Ibid.*, 172.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, 262, 297–298.
- ⁵ “The Quest of Erebor” can be found in Appendix A of *The Annotated Hobbit* by J. R. R. Tolkien, annotated by Douglas A. Anderson (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2002).

Chapter I

- ⁶ J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1965), 19.

Chapter 2

- ⁷ Connie Rupp and Peter Rupp, *Shackleton and the Endurance* (New York: Scholastic, Inc., 2001), 5.
- ⁸ Tolkien, *Hobbit*, 22.
- ⁹ Tolkien, *Letters*, 215.

Chapter 3

- ¹⁰ C. S. Lewis was a colleague and friend of J. R. R. Tolkien and author of The Chronicles of Narnia series, including *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. He encouraged Tolkien to finish *The Lord of the Rings*.