

Finding God in Harry Potter & the Sorcerer's Stone

Teacher's overview

It is important to know that Rowling didn't just throw together a clever children's tale in her Harry Potter series. She is apparently a big fan of classical literature and follow many of those classical patterns. Indeed, in John Granger's book "Looking for God in Harry Potter", he tells us that the books follow the foundations of alchemy just as Shakespeare, Tolkien and C.S. Lewis do. It can be argued that she does not approach the depth or masterful story telling of these bards, but she has touched a chord in today's youth that we cannot ignore. There is something in this series that is larger than other contemporary fiction that kids cling to and relish. This lesson is intended to probe that and allow you the youth worker to bring the larger themes hidden in Harry Potter to light.

There are some central themes that we can latch onto and use for catechetical purposes. While early on in the series many cast doubts about them because they saw the presence of "magic" as pointing to the occult, we can clearly dispel this by analyzing some of the overt ideas presented in the books:

- life after death
- the presence and critical nature of our souls
- the transcendence of love over hate and death
- the constant and growing battle between good and evil (and the people will choose to serve on both sides)

This lesson covers the first book/movie "The Sorcerers Stone", whose original title was intended to be "The Philosopher's Stone"; which again ties back to alchemy. Rowling uses alchemy's tenet of transformation on her main characters; Ron Weasley, Hermione Granger and of course Harry Potter.

Important symbols

- Lion of Griffindore: The Lion of Judah (just like Aslan in Narnia)
- The Phoenix: The resurrection bird. Also symbolic of the "Order of the Phoenix"
- The snake: used for Slytherin house and Voldemort's pet. Like the serpent in the Bible
- Death eaters: Orthodox Christians eat the Body and Blood for life. What is the opposite of that? Right, eating death!

Here is a map of Harry's hero journey (taken from John Granger's book):

Start: Privet Drive

Escape: Admission letters to Hogwarts and Hagrid's visit

Mystery: The stone's seeker and location

Crisis: Albus Dumbledore leaves

Descent: into the trap door

Combat: Struggle with Quirrell

Christ Symbol: The Sorcerer's (Philosopher's) Stone

Return: Albus after 3 days

Revelation: Snape is ok but Quirrell served Voldemort (Satan)

Finish: Station 9 & 3/4

This basic formula is actually followed in all 7 books! The climax of Harry's hero journey is a fundamentally Christian one; that death is followed by resurrection in Christ and in the answer to death is the symbol of Love -- Jesus Christ.

This lesson is extracted in part from the book "Looking for God in Harry Potter" by John Granger. It is also the result of watching the movie and matching up Holy Scripture with the strong symbols that JK Rowling has built into her books. We did this lesson by copying out the Scripture references and giving them to the class. When we reviewed a scene the class was asked to find the Scripture that matches up to it. Be ready to allow the kids to adopt Scripture in ways you didn't expect, sometimes with very profound results.

Above all, be friendly, flexible and have FUN with this. The kids appreciate these lessons as a change of pace we should value the opportunity to talk frankly about the media and the messages in it. The Harry Potter series gives us a wonderful platform to talk about spiritual growth, sacrifice and the differences between good and evil. Feel free to contact me & let me know what worked & how it can be improved!

In Christ,

David Elfering

Movie Sequences

Chapter 1 01:22 The first scene Professor McGonagal transforms from a cat into a human. Each person who has the ability to transform takes a specific form. Do you think that what they transform into represents something about their true character?

Scene 1 02:55 Dumbledore acknowledges that the muggles (non magic people) aren't the highest quality people, yet insists on leaving Harry with them. "They're the only family he has.." Much later in the books the real reason for this is revealed. Why might being with blood relation be so important?

Chapter 2 00:05 - 01:05 Harry is made to serve the Dursely family and endure their insults. How does he react to their constant taunting and abuse? What can that tell us about Christian character?

Chapter 3 00:00 - 00:20 Dursley tells Harry "there's no such thing as magic". How do you think this compares to the world's view of God?

Chapter 3 02:09 When Dursley is burning Harry's letters he takes great joy in doing so. Do you think this compares to the taunting Christians receive? What would many of your school friends say if you were to carry a Bible with you? Would they respect it? (Matthew 24:12)

Chapter 3 03:30 - 04:00 plus beginning of Chapter 4. When all the letters start piling into the Dursley's house, why do you think they elect to try and run away? How is this similar to how people try to distance themselves from God; even when faced with the witness of the Church through the ages? (

Chapter 4 02:00 Hagrid produces a cake from under his coat, and Harry sets the cake down to try and find out the truth. Isn't this a lot like our intention in fasting on Wednesdays and Fridays? We are supposed to set aside the cake of our daily existence and pursue true answers to life. Contrast this to Dudley's making a pig of himself. Mark 7:21

Chapter 7 00:00 - 03:15 (skip to 02:45 unless you want to watch the wand selection process which is amusing) Ollivander has difficulty picking a wand for Harry. Why do you think this is? He tells Harry that the wand he gets is the brother of the one that injured him. The scar actually symbolizes the mark left on us by the actions of Adam & Eve

Chapter 8 00:00 - 01:00 In the tavern Hagrid tells Harry how Voldemort killed his parents, but then failed to kill Harry. Something stopped him. What do you think that might have been?

Chapter 11 02:30 - Before the sorting Draco tries to tell Harry that some people are more worthwhile than others. What do you think this bias means? (Draco tries to attract Harry to worldly opinion of superficial appeal).

Chapter 12 02:15 The hat doesn't even hesitate when selecting Draco for Slytherin. Why? What does Ron say about Slytherin?

Griffyndore's symbol is the lion. Do any of you have an idea of what this might represent?

Chapter 15 In the scene of their first flying lesson, what do you think makes some people more successful than others at raising their broom? (belief & focus!)

Chapter 17 00:00 – 02:03 They name Harry a "seeker". What does the word seeker mean literally and in terms of faith/belief? Doesn't it seem interesting that Harry's goal is gold and is the answer to winning the game? (this has to do with Harry's quest for the truth). John 4:23

Chapter 18 02:00 Do the three main characters Harry, Ron and Hermione get along right away? What does it take for them to bond together? (adversity -- "... brothers are born for adversity..."). Proverbs 17:17
-key scene the mountain troll in the bathroom.

Chapter 24 01:30 Watch with the class to discover what the sorcerer's stone is.

Chapter 25 02:40 – 06:00 Watch the scene about drinking the unicorn blood. In the middle ages the Unicorn was adopted as a symbol of Christ and so the scene is about despoiling the purity of Christ, just as the hooded figure despoils the unicorn. It is also symbolic of unworthily receiving the blood of Christ (Communion without conscience). 1 Corinthians 11:27

Chapter 27 Descent into the pit and finding the key to the underworld. Harry, Ron and Hermione go through a trap door into an area beneath the castle. Psalm 35:7

Chapter 29 00:00 – 00:50 Ron decides to sacrifice himself for the sake of his friends. John 15:12-14

Chapters 30 (5:00), 31 () 32 Harry's defeat of Quirrel & Voldemort. Points of interest, Snape turns out to be ok though we thought he was evil. In chapter 31 Voldemort says "there is no good or evil...just power". When Quirrel is touched by Harry he dissolves. Why do you think this is? Why couldn't he overcome Harry? (the answer is actually given by Dumbledore in Chapter 32).

General Discussion

Do you think that the spells are meant to conjure things up from nothing, or do you think they resemble our habit of prayer? (we use different prayers at different times and with different intent).

One of the things JK Rowling put into this story is good versus evil. Who can name an example of this from the movie segments we just watched? Who do you think is on the side of evil? Who is on the side of good? Try to give us a reason for your opinion.

Do you think there is real magic like that which we see in Harry Potter (this is a good chance to discuss heresies such as Wicca and nature worship).

Biblical References

John 13:35 "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.

John 4:23 Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.

Mark 7:21 For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. 23 All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean.'

Proverbs 5:22 His own iniquities entrap the wicked man, And he is caught in the cords of his sin.

Proverbs 17:17 A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.

Proverbs 24:10 If you falter in times of trouble, how small is your strength!

Psalms 35:7 For without cause they have hidden their net for me in a pit, Which they have dug without cause for my life. "

Romans 6:16 Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?

Titus 1:16 They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work.

2 Peter 2:19 While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage.

Romans 8:21 because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

Acts 8:23 "For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity.

Hosea 5:14 For I will be like a lion to Ephraim, And like a young lion to the house of Judah. I, even I, will tear them and go away; I will take them away, and no one shall rescue.

Matthew 21:22 And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive.

Luke 10:19 Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you.

2 Corinthians 4:3 But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, 4 whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest

the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them. (those who choose not to believe will not understand as they will be blinded to the light of God... this is key to understanding Voldemort's shortcomings)

John 15:12 My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. 13 **Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.** 14 You are my friends if you do what I command. (Key to understanding the extreme sacrifices made by many of the series' main characters, most especially James & Lilly Potter).

Ephesians 6:12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places

Matthew 24:12 And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold

1 Corinthians 11:27 whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood[d] of the Lord. 28 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. 29 For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.