

# Harry Potter and the Christian Way of Power

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To Kelli,  
A Ravenclaw

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## Preface

This was truly a labor of love. Ever since I first picked up *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* I fell in love with the characters and Rowling's wizarding world. But as I heard certain Christians critiquing the books, I couldn't help but think they failed to grasp what these books were *about*. Harry Potter is about magic the same way that *The Lord of the Rings* is about jewelry. Magic is the context to address something more universal and foundational; these stories cut to the core concerning what it means to be human. My hope in this short book is to provide a reading of the Harry Potter narratives that exposes the depth of Rowling's insight, revealing the distinctively *Christian* vision of her writing. I also hope this e-book will help create a context for Christian parents to read the Harry Potter stories along with your children and use them to talk about the Christian life. To engage the wizarding world as a Christian entails entering this world with the same depth of imagination and creativity as your child while remembering that the wizarding world is meant to expose the reality of our own world; fantasy is meant to expose reality. May this book be your guide toward that end.

## SPOILER ALERT

What you have in your hands is an interpretation of the Harry Potter narrative. If you want to really grasp what is being said, it is best if you have already read the entirety of the seven books, and, if you really want to get the most out of it, you should also read *The Tales of Beedle the Bard*. This latter book is mentioned in the Harry Potter series as a children's book read by wizarding parents to their children to teach them about life. Dumbledore gives a copy to Hermione, and it provides incredibly helpful insight into the core moral features of the wizarding world. I will reference it at several points. In short: if you have not read any of these works, expect that their plot, twists, and meaning may be spoiled for you.

## Introduction:

### What Does Hogwarts have to do with Jerusalem?

“What does Athens have to do with Jerusalem?” is one of the oldest questions about how Christian thought engages culture and philosophy. Can we pose a similar question about Rowling’s wizarding world? It is, of course, reasonable to wonder how the wizarding world of Harry Potter could possibly have anything in common with the Christian world of the Bible. But this would be a failure to read deeply, both Harry Potter as well as Scripture. The stories about Harry Potter are an exposition of the story of Scripture – or at least part of it – and at their core they seek to articulate the Christian way of power over and against the way of the world.

There are several obvious clues that J. K. Rowling gives her reader about the biblical vision of her work. They are so obvious in fact, that she leaves them out in the open without much discussion or expansion. Like breadcrumbs along a path, these allusions are meant to encourage one on to deeper exploration. Unfortunately, many of us are too focused on the narrative itself that we fail to recognize these crumbs leading the way. We falsely believe, in other words, that the story is *about* magic, rather than allowing it to create a space to talk about power and what it means to be human and the influence of power on humankind for good or evil. Two examples will suffice at this point. First, with deep roots in the biblical narrative, Voldemort, who represents the way of evil, becomes more snake-like the more he enacts evil. Dehumanization happens in the wizarding world when a witch or wizard practices the dark arts. They become less than what they were created for. They reach below instead of above, and, in the end, they walk the way of the snake. From the Garden of Eden on (Genesis 3) this has been the weight humankind bears. Snakes, in

Rowling's wizarding world, are associated with the dark arts, no doubt in line with the snake of the garden. But whereas the snake in the garden could speak to humans, Rowling has an evil wizard who can speak to snakes, seeking out the way of evil at its root.

Second, and maybe even more obvious, is that Harry, the chosen one, must be killed and rise again to defeat evil (even if Harry did not technically die).<sup>i</sup> In fact, this very act breaks Voldemort's power in a way that many miss (possibly because more people watch the movies than read the books).<sup>ii</sup> But even more fundamental to the narrative is the theme of death itself; the theme of death mirrors the biblical portrayal well. In both Harry Potter and Scripture death is a character: In Rowling's narrative death is the character that all are trying to defeat, even being personified in the children's story "The Tale of the Three Brothers," whereas in Scripture, death is one of the "powers" that Christ overcomes. For both narratives, death is an enemy in God's creation that forces upon us the question: "In light of death, how shall we live?" In both of these examples we find signs pointing us to the Scriptures as a key to unlock the deep meaning present in Harry Potter.

The biblical focal point picked up by Rowling and her wonderful magical world is the theme of power. Magic, in the narrative, is simply the sphere in which power is enacted; magic unveils one's approach to power. There is a way of darkness and there is a way of light. There is a way that leads one to embrace the depth of their humanity, and there is a way that leads one to lose it. There is folly in magic and there is a way of wisdom. For the wizarding world, magic becomes the sphere in which questions of power take place; but the questions of power are universal. Rowling's narrative, therefore, mimics something from the Gospels. In the Gospel accounts of the life of Jesus, we are continually presented with three groups following Jesus. There is the small group of Jesus'

followers, who are devoted but often confused (as we'll see, their confusion often stems from a misunderstanding of Jesus' power); there is a group of people antagonistic to the way of Jesus, these people are often trying to trap or kill Jesus; and there is a group of people who are interested but not willing to embrace either side. The reader of Scripture is called to stand amongst these three groups to discern where they belong. In reading Harry Potter, we have the same experience.

# Chapter 1

## The Two Ways in this Present Evil Age

“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”

- Ephesians 6:12

The story of Harry Potter is about one major thing – power. But it is not primarily about *magical* power but about power itself. Magic provides a test-case for how we wield the power we have and to what end we wield it for – for goodness or for evil. What Rowling’s narrative does so well is highlight that our lives, in their entirety, are formed by our view of power. While we do not have the power of magic, we do employ what we have – our money, time, and resources – according to a certain way of power. What we think of as a powerful life defines how we live, and our quest to employ what we have unveils what power systems we serve. What we discover as we read the Harry Potter stories is that the central theme of power overlaps with what we find in Scripture. In both narratives, we are called to embrace a certain kind of power – power for love or power for domination. In both narratives, we are presented ways of power that form one according to either fear and death or life and resurrection. In both narratives we are offered two ways to live, but only one is the way of life.

Around the year 150ce, Christians penned one of their earliest works outside of the Bible, known as *The Didache*. There we are introduced to a biblical theme known as the two ways: “There are two ways, one of life and one of death, and there is a great difference between these two ways.”<sup>iii</sup> In the

Bible, Jesus is both the way of life and the embodiment of life. He is the one who lives life fully. He is the one who stands against the “powers” of the age. He is the one who recognizes that the human battle is not “against flesh and blood, . . . but against the cosmic powers over this present darkness” (Eph. 6:12). Jesus is the one who unravels the evil that the Bible calls “the powers and principalities.” This is not simply a fight to defeat sin. This is a fight against evil and death itself. As Scripture boldly declares, “The last enemy to be destroyed is death” (1 Corinthians 15:26) – the very verse etched into Lily and James Potter’s tombstone. The battle against death and the quest for eternal life is at the heart of the Harry Potter stories. But there is only one way that can truly defeat death; every other attempt to defeat death will become enslaved by it.

Like the wizarding school Hogwarts, death is one of the more under-appreciated characters in the Harry Potter narratives. Harry is constantly confronted with death – his life being marked (we could say, branded) by its continual presence. His enemies, interestingly enough, are known as “the death-eaters,” and when he reads the verse on his parents’ tombstone he is worried that his parents are following in the death-eaters’ way. This may seem minor, but it isn’t. Harry’s worry, that his parents are not properly perceiving death, points explicitly to the main issue of power at the heart of both Harry Potter and Scripture itself. The last enemy that needs to be defeated is death, no doubt, for both the good and the evil. That is not the question. Both sides believe that death needs to be defeated. The more fundamental question concerns how one goes about defeating death.

Death is the great equalizer of humankind. It confronts us all. After one becomes an adult, the rest of life becomes a slow prelude to death. There is no escaping its grasp. But that does not mean it masters us. Jesus confronts the temptation, we might say *desperation*, to master death when he states, “For

whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it” (Luke 9:24). In Jesus we see that one’s posture before death matters, and it matters a lot. Jesus’ ministry was a confrontation with death in all of its power, and he unraveled it from *within*. Jesus does not defeat death with domination, interestingly enough, or with a cunning use of power but through faithfulness. The Word of God declares,

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself [Jesus] likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery (Heb. 2:14-15).

It was in death that Christ broke the bonds of death, and in death where he defeated the one with the power of death. We’ll see that Harry must accept this same path. Death is a power that lurks in the brokenness of the world, and death’s presence reveals the nature of one’s heart. Often, when confronted with death, fear and anxiety pour forth from the heart. The fear of death subjects one to its slavery. On one side, we might be tempted to see life as a “slow prelude to death.” But this is to focus one’s attention on the wrong reality. That isn’t what life is. On the other side, we have the Malfoys, who seem powerful and successful but are driven by fear. They turn to success, sophistication, elitism, and social standing as a way to avoid the reality of death, but it haunts them. It would be naïve to assume that this error won’t tempt us. It is easy to allow death, and our fear of death, to dominate our lives. There is a way of death and a way of life, the earliest Christians remind us, and “there is a great difference between these two ways.”

### **The Two Ways in Scripture**

If we are going to recognize the biblical theme of power in Harry Potter, we must first focus our attention on how the Bible actually talks about power. In Scripture, we often see power contrasted according to the two ways, just as in

Harry Potter we are presented with the way of light versus the way of darkness, the way of evil versus the way of good. Similarly, James 3 compares and contrasts the “way from above” versus the “way from below.” In the wisdom literature we are confronted with the call to wisdom versus the call to folly. In books like 1 John, human lives are revealed as depictions of where a person is *from*: There is the way from the world, and there is the way of Christ, which is the way *from* the Father (1 John 2:16). This is developed in several metaphors: the way of light vs. the way of darkness (1 John 1:5), the way of truth vs. the way of falsity (1 John 2:21-22), the way of righteousness vs. the way of lawlessness (1 John 3:4-10), and, the central theme of 1 John, the way of love vs. the way of hate. All of these passages focus on who God is and the calling to give oneself to the way of God in Christ.

Jesus is “the image of the invisible God” (Col. 1:15) and “the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature” (Heb. 1:3). If we want to know what God is like, we look to Jesus. In the ministry of Jesus we are confronted with an entirely different way of living. Jesus reveals that he is a king of a different sort of kingdom, and this kingdom functions along a different sort of trajectory than the world. In Jesus’ kingdom, “the first will be last and the last first” (Matt. 20:16), and the one who tries to save their life will lose it, and the one who loses it for Christ’s sake will find it (Luke 9:24). Jesus overturns what we often take to be the only obvious way to life: seeking power and constructing a life that is solid, firm, and without vulnerability. Jesus tells us that this way of life is actually a slow kind of death. In other words, if we live life to find security, to fix the world with our power and ingenuity, or even if we seek to construct a life that is good, indestructible or valuable, what we will discover is that we have given ourselves to the way of death. In short, Jesus

gives us a depiction of reality, claiming that all of our strivings are a part of fantasy.

The problem we face is that most of us think this fantasy is reality. When confronted with the way of Voldemort or the way of Dumbledore it seems obvious which way is more powerful. This is one of the reasons why Voldemort can ascend to power so quickly. Even if people fear him, they still believe he will win. Voldemort assembles disciples so easily because people judge power with the wrong scale. They weigh the power of Voldemort against Dumbledore or Harry and they think his is weighty. But what the reader discovers is that they are wrong. Voldemort exudes strength, power, and savvy, and yet he is weak, powerless, and ignorant. This is the reality we are confronted with every single day – in our churches, in our elections, and in our social tensions. There is a way of power in the world, but it is discovered, first and foremost, as the one who walked the way of the cross.

This is a difficult message. Even if we were given a voice from heaven declaring this call, it would be nearly impossible to trust it. *Surely this cannot be right.* After Dumbledore's death, Harry is left to wonder the same thing. It is not until the very end that Harry comes to see that the way of love is actually more powerful than Voldemort's way. Fortunately for us, we do not have to trust a disembodied voice from heaven telling us about this way; we are given Jesus, the very Word of God (John 1), who embodies the way *from* the Father. The life of a Christian, therefore, entails that we partake in his life – that we abide in his love – and thereby bear witness to the way of life, truth, righteousness, and love. The problem, however, is that human beings are predisposed against this way. In our broken nature we seek out power-in-strength-for-control and come to see the power-in-weakness-for-love that the

Bible presents as foolish. The people around us, therefore, will not recognize this way for what it really is.

When Harry and Dumbledore proclaimed the return of Voldemort, what they discovered is that people would rather hear a lie that makes them feel better than the truth that unveils their fears. Light exposes darkness, and since we all have darkness within (1 John 1:8), the light of God's way exposes deep truths we would rather not experience. In the end it will take a Gryffindor, one marked by courage and bravery, to stand against darkness when darkness does not want to see the light. It will take a certain vision of death and life beyond death that helps form our heroes in the way from above. It will take more than power for domination to defeat death, it will take sacrificial love to unravel death from within, just as we find the death of death in the death of Jesus. But this view of reality is entirely counter-intuitive. Love may be great, but we do not believe it actually wields power over evil. Only those who walk in this way, and walk in it for a while, come to see how powerful this way of love truly is.

We see something similar in Scripture. The way of Jesus, which is the way *from* the Father, doesn't make sense to us in a commonsensical kind of way. The cross, which Paul refers to as the wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:24), isn't how we would try to save the world, and it certainly isn't how we would attempt to defeat death. Yet this is precisely what Jesus does. As it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart" (1 Corinthians 1:19). Jesus sets up a different system of wisdom and a different system of foolishness. More poignantly, we can see that this is ancient knowledge and is the way of love Jesus embodies in his teaching ministry. In the grammar of Harry Potter, this is an ancient magic, and the way of evil never takes it seriously. It is a "stumbling block" to those who do not know wisdom because it appears weak, foolish, and pointless (1

Corinthians 1:18-31). This is the way of Christian power, what we might call “kingdom power,” and it is the way of power in weakness for love. This is why Jesus tells Paul, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9), and it is precisely why Harry is called to walk the way of love. As we will see, the way of power in weakness for love is the only way to be human, and the way of power in strength for control is where we end up losing our humanity – becoming more “snake-like,” in the image of both Scripture and Harry Potter. The Christian is called to power, but it is of an entirely different system than the one the world recognizes.

### *The Backwards Power of the Kingdom*

If one were to attend to these themes while reading the Gospels, it would be clear that Jesus’ followers struggled with the way of power he is presenting. In Mark 8, Jesus asks his followers “Who do people say that I am?” His disciples respond with the current gossip about Jesus – some saying he is John the Baptist resurrected, others claiming he is the prophet Elijah resurrected, and still others wondering if he is one of the prophets (Mark 8:27-28). Like Harry, the chosen child, Jesus is always surrounded by rumors concerning his identity. After Peter confesses that Jesus is the Christ – the king God sent to his people – Jesus rejoices at his understanding. But this rejoicing does not last long. From this point on, for the rest of the Gospel of Mark, Jesus begins talking about the kind of path he has chosen. Right after Peter’s confession that Christ is king, we are told this: “And he began to teach them that the Son of Man [Jesus himself] must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again” (Mark 8:31). In response to this declaration, Peter rebuked Jesus! Peter had just declared Jesus king, and then he rebukes him.

Peter wanted to believe that Jesus was king, but more than that, he wanted Jesus' kingdom to provide worldly power. Peter wanted Jesus to be the kind of king he wanted. But Jesus is never that. Jesus' response is to offer the cross. More provocatively, Jesus responds to Peter's rebuke by declaring, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man" (Mark 8:33). By seeking worldly power, Peter was walking in the way of Satan – the deceiver. Notice that Jesus' followers were tempted to take good ends – Jesus' reign – and try to achieve his kingdom through false means. This is a theme that will constantly come up in the Harry Potter narrative. Nearly every character, even Dumbledore, is tempted to use false means for (relatively) good ends. We will always be tempted to use the way of darkness to create light, but sowing in darkness will always cause us to reap in darkness, to paraphrase a proverbial truth.

Like all of us, the disciples were inclined toward worldly power – a power that makes sense of our longing to win, be the best, and dominate. We too are tempted to use worldly power as the plumb line for power; we are tempted to assume that Voldemort's power really is true power. The Gospels are full of such people, totally confused by Jesus because he refused to accept their system and expectations of power. But his disciples reveal a deeper problem. The disciples believe in Jesus, they trust him, and yet they can't wrap their minds around the new kind of power he offers. What we find in the Gospels concerning power is exactly what we find in Harry Potter: we go looking for power, but we have to release it to embrace a deeper and more profound power – power known in the way of love.

When Jamin Goggin and I wrote on the nature of Christian power, the image from Scripture that stood out to us was the image of the dragon and the lamb, leading us to title our book, *The Way of the Dragon or the Way of the Lamb*.

This imagery is found in the book of Revelation, whose core theme is the two ways. Eugene Peterson narrates these two ways:

We choose: we follow the dragon and his beasts along their parade route, conspicuous with the worship of splendid images, elaborated in mysterious symbols, fond of statistics, taking on whatever role is necessary to make a good show and get the applause of the crowds in order to get access to power and become self-important. Or we follow the Lamb along a farmyard route, worshipping the invisible, listening to the foolishness of preaching, practicing a holy life that involves heroically difficult acts that no one will ever notice, in order to become, simply, our eternal selves in an eternal city. It is the difference, politically, between wanting to use the people around us to become powerful (or, if unskilled, getting used by them), and entering into covenants with the people around us so that the power of salvation extends into every part of the neighborhood, the society, and the world that God loves.

The way of the Lamb will always be the way of power in weakness for love.

The way of the Lamb will always entail that we abide in him, truly trusting that without him we can do nothing. The way of the Lamb entails that we give ourselves to subtle acts of heroism that seem so minor, so inconsequential, that they will be ignored by a world seduced by what's big, flashy, and self-important. The way of the Lamb will make sense of the martyrs, whose heroism in the face of death was witnessing to a much more profound way of life. The way we stand before death says much about how we understand life, and it is this theme that permeates the world of Harry Potter.

## Chapter 2

### Dumbledore and the Quest for Power

While Harry Potter takes center-stage in Rowling's narrative, there is a history that informs everything that happens to him. Confronted with evil and death, Harry comes to realize that he is caught up in a story that started well before he was born, and, interestingly enough, even before Voldemort. While the broader story of good versus evil goes back to the beginning, there is a specific struggle of good and evil that defines Harry's life. That initial struggle is within Dumbledore himself and within his own quest for power, a quest that shapes Harry's life more than he ever fully knows.

Whereas the epic battle of good and evil in Harry's day is between Voldemort and himself – the great evil wizard and the “boy who lived” – the previous battle was between Dumbledore and Grindelwald. This story, not told until the final book, reveals how deep the two ways run through the series. Because Dumbledore defeated Grindelwald, and because his philosophy of life proved antithetical to the dark arts, he became the great hope for the good (an identifier that Harry takes over after Dumbledore's death). Dumbledore and Harry end up acting as symbols for the defeat of evil. It is only after Dumbledore dies that the truth comes out about the secrets of his youth. Not only were Grindelwald and Dumbledore close friends for a time, but Dumbledore gave Grindelwald his famous slogan: “For the greater good.”<sup>iv</sup>

Regardless of their similarities, it does seem clear that Dumbledore and Grindelwald are not cut of the same cloth. These two young men had different ideologies. Dumbledore was the star student of Hogwarts who sought to use his brilliance for the sake of the greater good. Grindelwald, also brilliant, was learned in the dark arts at Durmstrang, a wizarding academy of continental

Europe (possibly, its whereabouts are secret), and sought to wield domination “for the greater good.” They had different visions of what that entailed, but they both came to believe that “the greater good” could be accomplished through their grasp for power. Dumbledore had yet to realize that seeking power in strength for control was, itself, antithetical to the greater good. This desire for power is so nefarious because it is fueled by a grandiosity that often goes unnoticed. It was the same for Jesus’ disciples. The Jewish disciples wanted to kill the Romans because they were under the oppression of Roman domination. They wanted to grasp domination to defeat it; they wanted to wield power “for the greater good.” Our political system is rife with these kinds of claims. Grindelwald’s slogan might as well be etched on the wall of congress and woven into the doormat of the Whitehouse. But it is not simply in the political sphere where these things thrive. We are all tempted by this desire in part because “the greater good” sounds so feasible on paper. The quest for the greater good seems like an ethics that makes sense, but it always ends up dehumanizing and oppressing.

At some point Dumbledore recognized that “the greater good” will always mean racism, oppression, and dehumanization. The way of darkness always thrives by these means. Dumbledore rejects this way for the way of love. He becomes the great lover of muggles, seeking to protect them at all cost; he becomes respected by other magical creatures often oppressed by wizards; and Dumbledore becomes the one who learns how to wield the power of love. He becomes a student of the deeper more ancient magic that Voldemort finds so weak and repulsive. But his discovery of the way of love comes out of suffering. Dumbledore had to watch his father suffer in prison because he took revenge on the muggles who abused his daughter. Dumbledore had to take responsibility for his family because his sister couldn’t control her magic and

accidentally killed her mother. He was forced to grow up too quickly, and he could easily have turned his angst and rage against the muggles.<sup>v</sup> But he refused to hate. He knew that hate only births further hate.<sup>vi</sup> He knew there must be a better way.

The way of darkness, in contrast to the way of love, seeks the greater good by seeking to redefine what “good” means. When evil gets power it always seeks to define goodness on its own terms, and when a society adopts a notion of “the greater good,” it is always defined by those in power. For the dark wizards, they are the greater good, and anyone they consider less than them, which includes wizards who are not “pure blood,” are seen as insignificant and worthless. These dark wizards are always racists, or species-ists, because they see other creatures as lesser beings; these wizards are desperate for a way to make themselves valuable, and so they lower others in an attempt to feel uplifted. The “greater good,” for the way of darkness, is the fruit of domination and oppression, seeking to rise above others by defeating and enslaving them. But this is the way of death.

What Jesus recognized that the way of darkness never seems to is that if you try to save your life – if you wield power for your own domination – you will always lose your life. This is not just an interesting saying of Jesus, we see it happen in the world every day. Jesus’ way is the way of abundant life and freedom (John 10:10), whereas the way of evil is a kind of enslavement. It is not just that one way is good and another way is bad, it is that one way is human and the other way is not. This is why Voldemort continues to become more and more snakelike and less and less human as he gives himself to evil. Voldemort sees that death is the great enemy, and he is right, in a sense, about that. What Voldemort misses is that he is enslaved to death because he fears it.

So while Harry's battle with Voldemort is the main plotline of these stories, it becomes clear that Harry's journey does not make sense without Dumbledore and Grindelwald. We can look at it this way: Grindelwald is the great evil wizard who gives birth, ideologically, to Voldemort, who takes his way of evil to greater heights. Dumbledore, in contrast, is the great wizard of love who gives birth, ideologically, to Harry, who takes the way of love and wields it in full. There are two family trees, so to speak, represented in these stories that mirror the notion of the two ways. Whereas in Scripture we can think about the two ways as *from* God or *from* the world, the Potter stories depict them as being from darkness or from light – from the way of death or the way of love, as represented by Grindelwald and Dumbledore (and then Voldemort and Harry).

### **Standing Before Death**

If the wizarding world thought that evil was defeated with Grindelwald's downfall, it didn't take long for them to learn otherwise. It turns out that Grindelwald is only the first-act to a much more nefarious and powerful wizard: Voldemort. But while Voldemort is greater than Grindelwald, he does not deviate much from his path. Voldemort's overall plan follows similar patterns as Grindelwald's, and in the end they even wielded the same wand for the same purpose (the elder wand, the wand of power that always entices those longing for domination).

Before Voldemort's downfall, when he tried (and failed) to kill Harry as a child, Voldemort's greatest rival was Dumbledore. By this point Dumbledore had seen his fair share of death and loss, and he had seen and experienced the folly of his youthful plans with Grindelwald. Dumbledore wasn't initially strong enough to stop Grindelwald from torturing his brother, and Dumbledore wasn't strong enough to stop his sister from being killed. These events, no

doubt, continued to radiate in his mind. Decades later, we learn this is true. When Dumbledore drinks the potion Voldemort left to guard his Horcrux, Dumbledore cries out that he should be the one that suffers – he should be the one feeling his family’s pain – and his cries radiate in the dark of the cavern with only Harry to hear them. These events lead Dumbledore to step into his weakness and choose to love, even when hate seems easier and more natural. Suffering, Dumbledore comes to recognize, is what it means to be human, and to reject it is to lose oneself to dehumanization.<sup>vii</sup>

After Dumbledore’s defeat of Grindelwald, he recognizes the same sort of evil at work in Tom Riddle. He watches the rise of Voldemort, the name Tom Riddle chooses as the self-proclaimed “Dark Lord,” and Dumbledore once again goes to battle with evil. Dumbledore and Voldemort come to represent the two ways, just as Dumbledore and Grindelwald did prior. They are witnesses to the two ways for the wizarding world, each calling others to their side, and both seeking to convince others to follow their path. Dumbledore has learned, through his suffering and loss, that the way of love is the only true way of power. He has seen firsthand how power warped Grindelwald and how he lost his humanity by seeking it. Dumbledore knew that a grasp for power and domination would cause the weakest to suffer the most, and he knew that only love could truly prevail. But he also knew that others were less convinced. He had to deal with politicians who may have wanted to believe in the way of light but whose methods were often closer to the way of darkness. He had to deal with students who were desperate for power and were convinced that there was no real power found in love. But more than anything else, he knew that the fear of Voldemort was likely to lead people to try to defeat him by using the same means he employed, and he knew that this would undermine everything they had suffered for. What Dumbledore

finds in Harry is a fellow sufferer who has been touched so deeply by darkness and death that he follows Dumbledore's quest faithfully, even though he doesn't know where it will lead. What Dumbledore has to convince Harry of is that he needs to give himself to love, even when confronted with how many friends he may lose along the way, and in light of how much he has already lost. Like Jesus with his followers, Dumbledore has to slowly unveil what this path before them entails, helping them to see that life comes through death and not in spite of it.

### *Escaping Death or Resurrection Life*

When the initial battle between Dumbledore and Voldemort begins, it is between two sides: the Order of the Phoenix and the death-eaters. Both groups are defined by death, in their name and in reality. The death-eaters are defined by the notion of immortality through the avoidance of death – they want to “eat death,” consuming it and thereby destroying it. But what they do not realize, in their practice of darkness, is that when they consume death it poisons them. Voldemort assumes that the only way to defeat death is to never die. That very decision was Voldemort's downfall and one of the marks of folly. His quest for immortality becomes his undoing. The quest itself, of course, is dehumanizing to him as well as others. Like Grindelwald, Voldemort leaves death, destruction, and abuse in his wake, only having followers who are too afraid to cross him. The death-eaters, regardless of why they pledged their allegiance to Voldemort, are only really around to further his quest for immortality. His obsession with death leads him to accept an economy of evil, and his view of death funds a broken view of life. As Harry comes to realize, Voldemort and his followers have nothing to live for because they have focused so completely on escaping death that they have no purpose in life.

The Order of the Phoenix have an entirely different motive. The goal of the Order is to face death in wisdom and in love. This is precisely why it is called the Order of the *Phoenix*. A Phoenix is a creature that must face its death in order to rise again. A Phoenix comes to embrace that death is not the end, nor is it even a defeat, but it is an opportunity to rise anew. To be a Phoenix one must put their hope in resurrection, which means one must come to see even death itself in light of resurrection hope. The Order of the Phoenix must not only fight Voldemort, therefore, but they must fight his ideology of death. Each member must be confronted with death. Each member must learn that death is not the final act of the grand drama they are in. It is only when they face death itself and accept it for what it is that they can embrace the wisdom that defines the Order. Dumbledore, of course, embodies this way, calling on Snape to kill him so that their plan against Voldemort could carry on; Harry continues, accepting his death as the only possible way forward. To be a true member of the Order of the Phoenix is to have faith that death is not the end; nothing else can help them walk the path they are on.

Both groups recognize that death is an enemy, but only one group understands the economy of death and the way it is truly defeated. By rejecting the way of wisdom, therefore, wizards like Voldemort become enslaved to death. These wizards cannot know freedom because their focus is on death rather than life. With a focus on death, and a heart formed by darkness, these wizards turn to evil and continue to dehumanize themselves and others. The irony is that the one who seeks to destroy death through power is allowing death to reign over his life and only leaves death in his wake. In the words of Scripture, “Whoever does not love abides in death.” (1 John 3:14) But the Order of the Phoenix is driven by the economy of love, and that changes everything. The members of the Order actually have something to live for, and

this is what Voldemort can never understand. His life is devoted to defeating death through immortality, but he has no actual life. The Order is learning to accept even death, and that acceptance allows them to embrace the way of love and therefore know the way of life. By refusing to make death the focus of their lives, the Order turns to love, trusting that love is the only way to actually live.

In a way, Dumbledore is trying to lead his people to the same place where God led Job at the end of that narrative. At the end of his life, after abundant suffering, Job comes to realize how little he understands about God and his way. But Job doesn't accuse God at this point, nor does he seek to somehow demand a higher sort of justice (whatever that might look like in the presence of God). Instead, Job comes to recognize his limitations, and he learns to love. After having his wife turn against him and losing all of his children, Job allows himself to love again. This is perhaps the most profound reality of the story of Job. After much suffering, he is still able to turn to hope and open his heart to love with his new family.<sup>viii</sup> It would have been easier to shut his heart down and refuse to be vulnerable again, but he hopes. Similarly, Dumbledore knows that the members of the Order of the Phoenix will suffer much at the hands of evil. He knows that they will lose spouses, children, and friends, as most of them already have before. He knows that they will be tempted, in one way or another, to give in to hate. But instead, he calls them to another way, the way of hope that Job embodied, and the way of hope personified by Harry.

## Chapter 3:

### The Three Brothers and the Two Ways

If you would have grown up in a magical family, your parents would have probably read you “The Tale of the Three Brothers.”<sup>ix</sup> The tale was simple enough: Three wizards, who were all brothers, magically built a bridge across a river when they couldn’t find a way across. Death is upset that they built a bridge because he was hoping for three more victims. To trick the brothers, Death grants them each a wish. The first brother asks for the most powerful wand in the world, and Death crafts him the Elder Wand from an elder tree. The second brother asks for a way to bring back the dead, and so Death offers him the Resurrection Stone, a stone that will resurrect the dead. The third and youngest brother was more humble and wise than his brothers. He asked Death for something that would allow him to hide from Death so he couldn’t be followed, and so Death handed him his own Cloak of Invisibility.

Death was cunning, we are told, and in his cunning he decides to tempt the brothers with power, knowing full-well that power will lead to more death. In part, Death was right. The first brother, full of pride and grandiosity because of the Elder Wand, went out and killed a man in a duel. After boasting about having the most powerful wand in the world, the brother is killed in his sleep and the wand taken. The second brother uses the Resurrection Stone to bring back his old love from the dead, but she was cold, sad and unable to really live in this world. Her veiled-presence drove the brother mad with “hopeless longing” and so he killed himself. Death conquered them with his seduction. But the third brother asked for something Death was unprepared for. The third brother asked for something humble and wise, something that would allow him to hide from Death. We are told,

But though Death searched for the third brother for many years, he was never able to find him. It was only when he had attained a great age that the youngest brother finally took off the Cloak of Invisibility and gave it to his son. And then he greeted Death as an old friend, and went with him gladly, and, equals, they departed this life.<sup>x</sup>

Like any really good children's story there are surface lessons to be learned and there are deeper lessons to attain. Because of this, most wizards never bothered to think that there was something true behind the tale of the brothers, assuming they were simply moral tales. In fact, it turns out that there really were three brothers, and whatever happened to them, they came to obtain the "Deathly Hallows" – the Elder Wand, the Resurrection Stone, and the Cloak of Invisibility. Few wizards had ever heard of these supposed "Deathly Hallows," and of the ones who did, most were skeptical. The Elder Wand was the most easily believable, as it had existed under different names with a bloody and storied history. The Resurrection Stone had no such history, and, as one would expect, neither did the Cloak of Invisibility.

### *The Deathly Hallows*

One of the things that Dumbledore and Grindelwald had in common, beyond being among the most powerful wizards of their age, was a belief in the Deathly Hallows. It is no wonder that the legend would have captivated them. We are told that the person who had the Deathly Hallows would be the "master of Death" (highlighting, again, the centrality of Death in the narrative). But while the children's tale chooses to make Death one of the main characters, notice what Death really does. Death makes an offer to each brother that merely unveils what is hidden deep in his heart. The oldest brother is desperate for power and domination, being a "combative man" already, and so Death happily makes him a tool to channel his folly. Death relishes in these kinds of characteristics, knowing that the kind of fool who lives by them will

meet him soon. Similarly, for the second brother, Death raises deep longings left unfulfilled. This person, unlike the biblical character Job, had been unable to love again after his loss and now only longed for what was gone. His hope is not in the future but in recovering the past. Lost in these desires, Death offers something inhuman, unnatural, and, in fact, unfulfilling. This brother's wish only increased his longings, exposing how deep they were, and leading him to greater levels of despair. Once again, this is where Death thrives. Death is not afraid of these things because they provide him with so many victims.

The third brother had neither the grandiosity of the oldest, nor the despair of the middle, but instead chose a path of humility and wisdom. This brother knew that Death could not be defeated, so he doesn't seek to. That said, Death does reveal something of the youngest brother's heart, which is precisely why he chose wisely. This brother *was* wise and *was* humble, so Death merely exposed his wisdom. This is why his choice was vastly different than his brothers. Instead of buying into fantasy, as his two older brothers did, this brother set himself firmly in reality. *What if our attempts to defeat Death actually fall into Death's trap? What if Death is inevitable, and what if that realization could lead to real freedom? What if one could live in such a way as to hide from Death until the proper time?*

The lesson of "The Tale of the Three Brothers" is not about the personification of Death, but concerns how one lives in order to stand before Death. Every brother dies, and so the story makes clear that Death is unable to be "defeated" in the way many desire. The wise person does not seek to avoid Death but to understand how to live in light of it. This is one of the fundamental calls of the Christian, and it has always been a topic of Christian wisdom. Wisdom is a refusal to live in fantasy about life and death and is a committed embrace of reality. This may sound ironic, particularly in a book

about Harry Potter talking about three wizards defeating a personified Death, but as Xenophilius Lovegood makes clear, the story goes well beyond the children's tale to point to deeper wisdom.<sup>xi</sup> The purpose of the story is about what it entails to live wisely before death.

### *Reality Beyond Fantasy*

One of the great fantasies of our age, not all that different from the two older brothers, is that we can somehow avoid death. We tend not to look to magic to do so, we simply enter into a state of denial about it. Our denial is a kind of fantasy that if we do not attend to our death maybe it won't happen. But we will all face death. Most people in world history have been confronted with death to a much greater degree than we have. In a world before hospitals, it would have been a relatively frequent occurrence to have people die on your couch. Death would have been a normal feature of existence, and if you ever let this slip your mind, the graveyards in the center of town (surrounding the churches no doubt) would remind you.

The "The Tale of the Three Brothers" is a narration of the two ways – the way of life and the way of death. The first two brothers choose the way of death by foolishly trying to defeat death. The third brother chooses the way of life by seeking wisdom. "The Tale of the Three Brothers" forces the reader to grapple with how their choices in life help them stand before death (or, in contrast, lead them to it). The goal is to help the reader understand life in light of their inevitable death. The youngest brother was able to greet Death gladly at the proper time because of his life and his choices. Notice that while the older two brothers were plagued with Death – one trying to conquer it through power and the other trying to reverse it – the youngest never attempts either. The younger brother never seeks the folly of defeating Death, he was much more interested in living well. This is the point behind the Cloak of Invisibility,

which wasn't simply a way to "hide" from the *sight* of Death. The Cloak of Invisibility is an extension of the wisdom of the youngest brother and therefore is a tool in the hands of someone who knows how to live well. The Cloak of Invisibility represents that the way of wisdom helps one avoid death, more often than not, until the proper time. When one is confronted by death, wisdom allows for a person to accept death's inevitability without accepting its finality.

An example might help. The older brother is killed in the end, not because he had the most powerful wand in the world but because he boasted about it and acted foolishly. Death follows the Elder Wand because the people who tend to wield it are the kinds of people who seek power and domination (Dumbledore, in contrast, had the wand but never boasted about it). But what if the older brother had the Cloak of Invisibility? Would it change anything? If the oldest brother had received the Cloak of Invisibility he would have boasted about that as well and would have been killed in his sleep anyway! What the children's story does so well is to highlight that the younger brother was wise, and therefore it is his wisdom that allows him to greet Death as a friend and not the cloak itself. Humility and wisdom are seen in the narrative as the prime characteristics of the person who is truly human. The two older brothers, driven by arrogance and folly, choose to try and defeat death rather than embrace the truth about themselves before death. In their folly, the two older brothers chose ways of life that were sub-human and fell into the trap Death has set for them. In the end, the one who has walked the way of wisdom, humility, and love will come to greet death like an old friend, no longer fearing death because they've come to know life.

### *The Calling of Weakness*

Dumbledore knew that Voldemort's defeat would ultimately rest on the head of Harry and would therefore also rest on his friends. Consequently, Dumbledore knew he needed to shepherd Hermione, Ron, and Harry to become the kinds of people who could walk the path of wisdom. He knew that they would have to pick up the battle when he was killed, but he also knew that they needed to embrace their weaknesses. This required more than just teaching – he could easily have explained this to them and they wouldn't have been able to understand – they needed to *experience* this reality. They needed to figure out why they were fighting their fight in the first place. They had to discern what the true difference was between the way of darkness and the way of light.

To guide them in the way of light, Dumbledore left each of them something in his will (along with a clue concerning the Sword of Gryffindor). Each item in his will was meant to lead them, individually and as a group, to embrace their weaknesses. Hermione, who always knew so much, needed to realize that she must become like a child. She had to look beyond the memorization of facts to true wisdom. So Dumbledore left her a children's book. For Hermione, there were few things that would have been so frustrating. In her literal mind she struggled to figure out how a children's book could possibly be helpful. When she heard "The Tale of the Three Brothers" for the first time Hermione couldn't help but think it was just a silly fairytale. She needed to look beyond the letter and see the spirit of the story that was being told.

Ron, likewise, received an odd gift: Dumbledore's own Deluminator, an object that was able to take light away from its sources and contain it. This, in and of itself, seemed like little more than a party trick. But it was more than

that. Dumbledore knew that Ron had always struggled in Harry's shadow, and in the pressure of their journey, with the weight of Horcruxes upon them, Dumbledore knew Ron would "run out" on Harry and Hermione. But he also knew that he would long to find them.<sup>xii</sup> Ron had to take a journey through his littleness, his desire for Harry's celebrity, and his longing to be out of his shadow, and he had to come to grips with who he is and what he is called to. Ron had to learn that he too was loved and that he was not simply identified by Harry, by being poor, or by being a Weasley. Ron needed to know that he was seen and known and loved, but that kind of healing only comes through our pain and brokenness and never by avoiding it. Harry began to realize this, so when Ron found them again, he made Ron confront the Horcrux. Ron had to experience his heart "read" out-loud by Voldemort, in all of his weakness, and he had to walk through it. Ron needed that victory in his weakness for the path they were taking, and no amount of information could have solidified it for him.

Harry had a similar experience. Harry was courageous and never hesitated to act. But however virtuous this can be, courage has to be tempered by patience and discernment to be truly virtuous. Dumbledore knew that Harry was not yet ready for what he had given him, and he knew that Harry would struggle with the lack of information he was given. So Dumbledore gave him the Snitch he caught in his first Quidditch match at Hogwarts.<sup>xiii</sup> When Harry touched it with his mouth, where he originally caught it, the words appeared, "I open at the close."<sup>xiv</sup> Harry would have to trust Dumbledore – that he knew where this path was leading – and he would have to wait. For each of them individually, and their cadre collectively, they had to embrace their weakness. Hermione had to learn the ways of a child, Ron had to confront his insignificance so he could embrace his proper role, and Harry had to have his

mettle tested concerning his trust in Dumbledore. It was in these places that they had to discover power – in their weakness and not in their strength.

*Harry, the Deathly Hallows, and the Way of Wisdom*

Under the careful and wise tutelage of Dumbledore, Harry is able to learn the way of wisdom so that he was able to wield the Deathly Hallows well. It is important to remember that none of the Deathly Hallows are evil in their own right. But it is also important to remember that Death was purposefully tricking the brothers, and therefore each tool is marked with unique temptations. Because of this, there is a necessary path of wisdom that must be trod first, so that when one wields the Hallows they are not destructive.

Harry's life can serve as a model for the proper way to receive the Hallows. Harry comes to know a deeper wisdom that eventually allowed him to walk, willingly, to his death. This is the power of love that Voldemort could never understand, because Harry walks to his death out of love for his friends.<sup>xv</sup> Unlike Voldemort, Harry is not a slave to death because love prevails in his heart. When Harry finds out the truth about his calling, we are told, "Harry understood at last that he was not supposed to survive. His job was to walk calmly into Death's welcoming arms."<sup>xvi</sup> Because he has come to accept the reality of death and the nature of his calling, Harry is the one who can truly unite the Hallows in wisdom. By embracing wisdom, Harry is the proper heir of the youngest brother.

By giving himself so fully to the way of love, Harry was able to unite the Hallows according to the power of love – the fundamental grounding of reality. He had the Cloak of Invisibility, which he used to walk to Voldemort who was waiting to kill him. Like the younger brother, Harry had come to accept that his time had come, so he used the Cloak to greet Death as a friend. He also had the Resurrection Stone, but rather than using it to try and undo death, he used

it for courage to walk to his own. The middle brother had used the stone to try and bring back someone from the dead, but Harry recognized that this was folly. Instead, we are told, “It did not matter about bringing them back [Harry’s lost loved ones], for he was about to join them. He was not really fetching them: They were fetching him.”<sup>xvii</sup> Instead of undoing death, and thereby transgressing what is natural, Harry used the stone for support so he could greet death as a friend. Similarly, when Harry receives the Elder Wand, he chooses not to keep it and seek its power but to use it to fix his own wand.<sup>xviii</sup> Harry had to trust and believe that the Hallows, which all offered temptations to power, were only truly powerful by the one who embraced self-sacrificial love. The one who tried to save his life with the Hallows would lose it, but the one who used the Hallows for others would discover the life of love anew.

By the time Harry had discovered what he must do, he had become the kind of person who could do it. This wasn’t always true of Harry of course. But because he was marked by death for his entire life, watching loved ones suffer for him and constantly feeling abuse, neglect, or the grief of losing his parents, Harry was never unrealistic about death. This doesn’t mean Harry wasn’t tempted by the Hallows, he certainly was for a time. As his experience in front of the Mirror of Erised proved, Harry would have been most tempted by the Resurrection Stone.<sup>xix</sup> This is a temptation he shares with Dumbledore.<sup>xx</sup> Dumbledore’s death is a result of his own seduction by the Hallows – putting on the ring of Slytherin, whose stone was the Resurrection Stone, because he wanted to bring back his family and beg their forgiveness. Deep down, even Dumbledore wants to undo death.<sup>xxi</sup>

When Harry walks into the woods to face death, he is struck by Voldemort’s killing curse. When he wakes up, Harry meets Dumbledore in some kind of afterlife experience that oddly resembles King’s Cross Station. It

is there that Dumbledore admits his own temptations with the Hallows and his own desires to defeat death. But it is also there where Dumbledore confides to Harry that he knows Harry is the better man. Dumbledore realized that he couldn't unite the Hallows in wisdom like Harry, he had been too tempted by them, so he states:

Maybe a man in a million could unite the Hallows, Harry. I was fit only to possess the meanest of them, the least extraordinary. I was fit to own the Elder Wand, and not to boast of it, and not to kill with it. I was permitted to take and to use it, because I took it, not for gain, but to save others from it.

But the Cloak, I took out of vain curiosity, and so it could never have worked for me as it works for you, its true owner. The stone I would have used in an attempt to drag back those who were at peace, rather than to enable my self-sacrifice, as you did. You are the worthy possessor of the Hallows.<sup>xxii</sup>

To unite the Hallows one must utilize them in love and for love. To truly use each of these tools well, one needed to use them for love. Dumbledore could use the Elder Wand well because he rejected arrogant boasting and used it to serve and protect. The Cloak could be used to hide others, as Harry so often did, or even hide himself so that he could fight for his friends (as he does in the final battle).<sup>xxiii</sup> The Stone was not to be used to bring back the dead from their peace, showing one's own self-centeredness, but, like Harry, to use it to help one sacrifice themselves for others. At the heart of the system of love is the axiom that the way of love is marked by sacrificing oneself for others. This is not simply a nice fairytale notion but is the deepest magic engrained in the fabric of reality.

### **The Way of Children**

If we sit with the overall narrative described by Rowling, there is something deeply sad about Voldemort. He was a broken child who, at some point, hid his heart away. If only he had parents who loved him, and who could have read

him *The Tales of Beedle the Bard* at night, he might have learned that way was foolish.<sup>xxiv</sup> But unlike the wizard in “The Wizard and the Hopping Pot,” Voldemort never learned that failing to use magic to help others will lead to one’s own destruction. He didn’t know the story of “The Fountain of Fair Fortune,” and so he never grasped the importance of friends and healing. He was not familiar with “The Warlock’s Hairy Heart,” and so he made the exact same mistake – he used dark magic to lock his heart away, thereby killing any hope of happiness, love, and life. And if only someone had read him “Babbitty Rabbitty and Her Cackling Stump,” he would have learned that magicians cannot defeat death.

But by the time that Dumbledore met little Tom Riddle, he was already too broken to learn from childish things. These things were too simple – too silly – for him to learn any deep magic from them; or so he thought. Dumbledore, on the other hand, meditated deeply on these stories because he understood the depth of truth they provide. There is only one way of life, and it is the way of love. Voldemort never really sees how much he has lost along the way because he had become so hard-hearted that he could not grasp that others had something he didn’t. Voldemort had rid himself of the ability to be empathic, sad, weak, and vulnerable, and he relished in his victory, but he never grasped that in losing these, he lost everything meaningful (a commonality with our own coping strategies). Dumbledore leaves Hermione *The Tales of Beedle the Bard* hoping the stories will help them defeat Voldemort. But more so, Dumbledore left them this children’s book hoping they will discover how to truly live. Defeating Voldemort was never the ultimate goal for Dumbledore. Rather, the goal was love.

## Chapter 4:

### The Calling of Wisdom: Hogwarts as a Place of Love

In a delightful article on the nature of love in Harry Potter, Jake Meador meditates on the order (or lack thereof) found in Hogwarts School of Magic. He points out how Fleur Delacouer claims that things tolerated at Hogwarts wouldn't be tolerated at her own school. Hogwarts is seen, in some way, as too loose, too chaotic, and too open. Notice how opposite this is compared to those who don't even want "mixed-blood" witches and wizards in the school, let alone Peeves the Poltergeist! Meador highlights how many of these characters are around Hogwarts:

Some of these are marginal characters—the schools many ghosts come quickly to mind. Others are much more important to the story. One teacher is a former Death Eater—a supporter of Voldemort, the main villain of the series. And yet he is welcomed at Dumbledore's Hogwarts. Another teacher was expelled from the school when he was a student but allowed to stay at Hogwarts and work as their gamekeeper. Still another is a werewolf, something of an untouchable in wizarding society yet he too is warmly received at Hogwarts.<sup>xxv</sup>

Under Dumbledore's guidance, Hogwarts functioned on the economy of love rather than power. This is why folks like Lucius Malfoy are convinced that Dumbledore is the worst thing that happened to Hogwarts. He is unable to understand the kind of power Dumbledore is trying to instill in his students – the power of love – and therefore is unable to understand the kind of environment this way necessitates. As Meador reflects on this, he notes that the two ways being presented, in *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* in particular,

are the way of love versus the way of coercion. Coercion does not allow for one to be catechized in the way of love. Coercion assumes a power structure of domination and is unable to believe that there could be another way of power. This is precisely why Hogwarts doesn't ever fully fall into the ways of evil power, whereas the Ministry of Magic falls rather easily. The Ministry of Magic, while not living fully in the way of power by domination, assumed the same basic tenants. This is why the original fountain in the ministry revered wizards above the other magical creatures. It was much more subtle than the dehumanizing and racist fountain that was erected after the fall of the ministry to Voldemort, but the same basic ideas were at play.

Meador notes how Umbridge personifies the assumptions of the ministry, which is precisely why she cannot understand Dumbledore, who thinks her views of power and control are foolish. "In this respect," Meador notes, "she is like Tolkien's Sauron, who only imagines that his rivals would attempt to possess and control the One Ring for their own devices. It never even occurs to him that they might desire to destroy it; that they might reject the way of life implied by the Ring."<sup>xxvi</sup>

It's this same small-mindedness that explains why Umbridge is so merciless and Dumbledore so merciful. The reason Dumbledore gives his students freedom and doesn't rule over Hogwarts with an iron fist is that he knows what they can become. Dumbledore understands what Lewis said in *The Weight of Glory*, that every single student at Hogwarts might grow into something splendid or horrifying.<sup>xxvii</sup>

What Dumbledore is interested in are students who embody wisdom. Wisdom, if we recall, is the way of love, which in turn is a power system that leads one to stand before death well. But Dumbledore knows that this is not an easy sell. His students, even with their children's stories, will be tempted toward power: they will see magic as a way to achieve domination instead of employing it for others, they will see their abilities as opportunities to generate the life they want

(and will therefore often accept love potions over the profoundly messy reality of romantic love), and they will too often accept what is easy and self-serving over what is difficult and self-sacrificing. To help instill his vision of wisdom Dumbledore knows that these students must experience a place of love, belonging, and grace.

### **The Body of Hogwarts**

Paul describes the body of Christ as a body with many members (i.e., with hands, feet, eyes, etc.) that all must work together in unison and not demean each other and create hierarchies of value based on worldly power structures (1 Cor. 12). Each person in this image is like a body-part, and therefore, for the Church to be the body of Christ well, each person must accept that they have been given a specific role in a broader nexus of callings. Furthermore, we are told that the body-parts we tend not to talk about and often think of as demeaning and low, are, in fact, of more value than the ones the world sees as powerful. This is something the church often forgets. But it should not surprise us that after this discussion Paul moves immediately into his beautiful rendition of love and the fruit of love (1 Cor. 13). To create the society depicted in 1 Corinthians 12, the Church must accept an economy of love to govern it.

Under Dumbledore's reign as Headmaster, Hogwarts is meant to be this kind of society. One of the ways this vision of Hogwarts is taught to the students is through the Sorting Hat's song. In *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, the Hat's song focuses on unity among the four houses at Hogwarts. The original founders "had a selfsame yearning" that Hogwarts would be the best magical school around.<sup>xxviii</sup> According to the Hat's song, the original four founders would never have imagined that their houses would be divided, and, in particular, Slytherin and Gryffindor were incredibly close. The Sorting Hat goes on to name the particular issue that created division. Each house chose

specific virtues to focus on for their students (like different parts of a body). Slytherin wanted those with a pure ancestry, Ravenclaw wanted those of the highest intelligence, Gryffindor wanted students who were brave, and Hufflepuff was open to teach everyone. These four emphases led to different house cultures. Slytherin house became all pure-blood wizards of great cunning, which led to a culture of elitism. Ravenclaw took only the sharpest minds, whereas Gryffindor focused on the brave and bold. Hufflepuff is the one house that seemed open to all, but even this is a kind of value system. These value systems turn, rather quickly, to power systems, and the students accept the delusion that their voice in the overall chorus of Hogwarts is the only one that matters. Instead of being a single family, the houses created an “us versus them” kind of mentality, and, in particular with Slytherin, the “us versus them” mentality had a kind of classism attached to it. These tensions fed on their “faults and fears,” and, in turn, each “sought to rule.” The notion of ruling is particularly troubling in a place where harmony was supposed to reign. The Sorting Hat’s song turns into a lament concerning the role he has to play in sorting the students into division. The song turns into a call for unity, and it is this unity that never fully happens.<sup>xxix</sup>

The problem, of course, was a broader one. The students come from families who live in a magical subculture that probably never bought into Voldemort’s radical agenda, but who weren’t entirely opposed to its core ideas either. When Sirius explains to Harry how Voldemort rose to power, he says, “there were quite a few people, before Voldemort showed his true colors, who thought he had the right idea about things... They got cold feet when they saw what he was prepared to do to get power, though.”<sup>xxx</sup> The radical evil of Voldemort wasn’t treated as such, but he was, instead, treated as a radical whose ideas were a bit off (rather than seen as entirely dangerous). People

failed to recognize that an ideology of death and dehumanization needed to be unearthed by an entirely different understanding of what it means to be a human being. The students, therefore, imbibed a culture that enabled subtle evils to fester beneath the surface. Fudge, the Minister of Magic, is so blinded by fear that he cannot see reality for what it is. He chooses to live in fantasy rather than reality, simply because fantasy feels better. In the Ministry of Magic, while they were not outright racists, they had no problem with a fountain that not-so-subtly implied that centaurs, goblins, and house elves were lower magical creatures than wizards.<sup>xxxii</sup> Even Sirius treated his house elf Kreacher like he was worthless, and, unsurprisingly, Kreacher continued to digress.<sup>xxxiii</sup> As an aside, and contrast, one of the most obviously redeemed characters in the story is Kreacher, who, when loved, begins to thrive.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

While this culture of enablement cannot be blamed for Voldemort's reign, nor can these instigators be considered anywhere near as depraved, they were, nonetheless, connected to the same way from below. While their evil was not of the same strength, it was of the same kind, and that is what we have to wrestle with. This is why James can link together the world, the flesh, and the devil under the rubric, "the way from below" (James 3). It is not simply that Voldemort is evil and the other racist wizards were slightly off. Rather, the way of Voldemort and the way of the broader wizarding world was the same – they simply lived them out differently. In Scripture, we find that the only possibility of standing against this way from below is the way from above, and this way, as the Sorting Hat points out, has to be the way of unity. The theme of unity, in Hogwarts and in the wizarding world, becomes fundamental because "love unites all things" (Col. 3:14). The way of love demands unity because it is a way that calls for vulnerability, otherness, and sacrifice. But when this way is rejected, and when the way from below is accepted, to whatever degree, we buy

into a system that will inevitably blossom into the way of death: whatever we sow, we will reap – this is one of the most fundamental axioms of biblical wisdom.

### *The Way of Friendship*

In Rowling's narrative, true friendship serves as a sign that you are walking in the way of love.<sup>xxxiv</sup> Hogwarts was meant to be an incubator for deep friendship: within houses, beyond houses, and, as is the purpose of the Tri-Wizard Tournament, even across wizarding schools. For those like Sirius, Hagrid, and Harry, who have either lost their families or have rejected the way of their family, Hogwarts becomes a place to discover family anew. There is a deep sense of belonging for those who have found this sort of love at Hogwarts, which is why, particularly for Harry, he sees it as his true home.

This could be why romantic love is pushed to the edges of the narrative.<sup>xxxv</sup> The reader gets to witness these teenagers struggle through their desires and longings, but it never overtakes the focus. The focus is on friendship. At the center, of course, is Harry, Ron, and Hermione. While Ron and Hermione slowly walk through the romantic tension in their relationship, it never takes away from the union the three share together. Furthermore, even though their group is tightknit, it is still porous. It is as if their closeness allows them the freedom to receive and accept others – particularly others who struggle with friendship. They adopt Hagrid, Luna, and Neville into their group, providing a space for them to be known and loved. Friendship requires a certain embrace of one's weaknesses, and the weaknesses of others, and so one's view of power is directly related to receiving or rejecting the friendship-love of another. The Stoic philosopher Seneca narrates well the friendship-love that Hermione, Ron, and Harry share: "What is my object in making a friend? To have someone to be able to die for, someone I may follow into exile,

someone for whose life I may put myself up as security and pay the price as well.”<sup>xxxvi</sup> For the Order of the Phoenix, each member is learning to make this vow of friendship – regardless of what they were originally signing up for. They all have come to accept this way of love.

### **The Fruit of Love and the Fruit of Death**

Hogwarts was meant to function according to the way of love because Dumbledore was training up witches and wizards of wisdom. He encouraged friendship, gentleness, and kindness, and his call for loving others was almost synonymous with his name. But the wizarding world functions like the real world. You cannot simply focus on the right ends if you want wisdom, you have to embody the right means as well. To use biblical imagery, only the one who is planted by streams of water will truly thrive, and those waters are the waters of wisdom (Psalm 1). Similarly, the Apostle Paul writes to the church in Galatia,

Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. (Gal. 6:7-9)

One of the bedrock realities of wisdom in Scripture is the axiom that whatever you sow you will reap. If you sow an orange seed and are expecting an apple tree, you are a fool according to biblical wisdom. Or, similarly, if you sow a seed on hard places where it cannot sink into the soil, the seed will fail to thrive. We are the same. We have to be the kinds of people who can have the Word sink down deeply within us, and we have to sow the right kinds of seed. It is not unimportant that Paul anticipates that people will need to be encouraged not to grow weary in doing good. Goodness, like planting a seed, takes time. If you plant an orange seed hoping for an orange tree in a week or

two, you will be wildly disappointed. When we plant seeds we wait, and we wait, and we wait, and we do not grow weary in our waiting because there simply is no other way. This is how it feels to live a life of goodness in this world.

This is how the way of evil seduces people. The way of evil is always easier. The way of evil doesn't take time, because it taps into our most primitive selves. The way of evil doesn't ask us to become more but to become less than what we already are. Because evil offers power, and because it offers power by giving in to our base inclinations, the way of evil seduces us to accept less than we were made for. But whatever we sow, we will reap. There is nothing as sad, I think, as an older person who should be full of wisdom who is really full of folly. To be old and not wise is to reap a life of superficiality and leaves one with no purpose in their waning years of life. Dumbledore, in contrast, represents a person who is reaping what he has sown, which is precisely why he is so sought after and respected; but this kind of life doesn't happen by accident.

Once again, the theme of death is close to the surface. Dumbledore is seeking to create students who can thrive at life so they can stand before death in wisdom. The only reason that Dumbledore believes we can stand before death is that he believes in the way of the Phoenix, who knows that death is not the end. In the Words of Scripture,

When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Cor. 15:54-57)

For the Christian, death is not the final reality, but it is a power that has already been defeated by Christ. The verse written on James and Lily's grave claimed

that the final enemy to be defeated is death. This is true, although it has already been defeated in Christ, which is why we are told, “Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death.” (John 8:51) Furthermore, “We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him.” (Rom. 6:9) The way of the Christian is the way of the Phoenix, it is no longer fearing death because death has lost its sting. In the death of Christ we witness the death of death, and so now we bear witness to its powerlessness over us. Harry was able to walk freely to his death because it held no power, so that even in his weakest moment he was the strongest one standing. Every death eater who taunted him lived in fear, whereas he was free. His life was a witness to a life beyond death. His willingness to face death proclaimed loudly that there are much worse things than dying. Harry had come to know that each action in life was forming his soul for another place. As Scripture declares, “For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.” (2 Cor. 4:11)

Harry’s life manifested another way, which becomes clear in King’s Cross Station. The warped, sick, and twisted soul of Voldemort withered in that world and was foreign and helpless in the purity of that place. Voldemort gave his life to a way that deformed him, and he put his faith in a way he believed would make him powerful, when in reality it made him impotent.<sup>xxxvii</sup> Proverbs 16:2 states, “All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, but the LORD weighs the spirit.” Voldemort’s way was pure in his own eyes because he was unable to recognize the power love provided, even when it was defeating him. Voldemort sought out a path to become weighty, and in the end he became little of soul.

For Hogwarts to embrace the way Dumbledore envisioned, the houses would have to unite behind a grander vision of power than what was being offered. Perhaps that vision was already at work beneath the surface, but that is not quite good enough. The way of love needed to be out in the open. Hogwarts is a battlefield for the two ways; Hogwarts is the recruiting ground where wizards learn the way from above or the way from below. Sometimes we are pushed down one road or another by making the right or the wrong friends, as Draco learns too slowly. But as Harry discovered, the path from above is not the easy path. The path Harry chose shone a light in Hogwarts that exposed how dark some of its corridors had become. For Hogwarts to stand firm against evil, it must embrace unity in the way of love. For Hogwarts not to grow weary in sowing goodness, the students must trust that whatever they sow they will reap in the end.

## Chapter 5:

### Harry, Voldemort, and the Two Ways

The core theme of the Harry Potter series is two interrelated questions: First, what is the true way of power? Second, how does one live in relation to death? The ways of life that Voldemort and Harry live out are the two main ways to address these questions. Voldemort seeks power in strength for control and domination, and Harry seeks power in weakness for love (these categories for power are developed in *The Way of the Dragon or the Way of the Lamb*). Voldemort sees death as something to defeat through power, whereas Harry sees death as the end of this life and a journey to another. Both seek to defeat death, but only one knows what that actually entails. Voldemort, in other words, lives a life of fantasy that destroys his soul, whereas Harry is on a journey to become “weighty of spirit.”

#### **Power in Strength for Control**

When Jesus confronts the power structure of his day, he presents a view of power that is entirely opposite from the world’s understanding. Jesus claims, “For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?” (Matt. 16:25-26) Voldemort fails to answer this question in wisdom. Voldemort’s life, one could say, is a retort to Jesus, “You wanna bet? I bet I can save my life and not lose my soul!” Voldemort, unsurprisingly, fails. In his attempt to save his life and gain immortality, Voldemort loses his soul. In his attempt to be first, to quote another of Jesus’ sayings, he became last. (Matt. 20:16)

Because Voldemort fails to understand reality, he creates a fantasy where power can be found in strength for control. This is an easy fantasy to buy into because it is the fantasy the bulk of human history has put their faith in. But this is folly. Because Voldemort seeks power for control the only category he understands is strength. This leads him to prey upon and abuse all those he considers weak. This is what initially inclines him to professor Quirrell, who Voldemort embodies in the first book. Quirrell, talking more to himself than anyone else, utters, “he is a great wizard and I am weak,”<sup>xxxviii</sup> stating the obvious to anyone who interacted with him.

Quirrell is the kind of person Voldemort likes having around; Voldemort likes to command and despise his followers equally. The very thing he likes about them is the thing he despises most, but he, nonetheless, only seems to find these kinds of followers (with a couple of exceptions). Quirrell continues to reflect on how much Voldemort taught him, claiming, “A foolish young man I was then, full of ridiculous ideas about good and evil. Lord Voldemort showed me how wrong I was. There is no good and evil, there is only power, and those too weak to seek it.”<sup>xxxix</sup> This, in a nutshell, is the way of Voldemort. This is Nietzsche’s superman, and Voldemort is happy to tread upon the weak as he grasps power.

When the young Harry ruins Voldemort’s plan in book 1, Voldemort leaves Quirrell to die. Dumbledore explains that Voldemort “shows just as little mercy to his followers as his enemies,”<sup>xl</sup> which becomes clear when he tortures them for their ineptness.<sup>xli</sup> The way of power that Voldemort embodies is always dehumanizing. This, at first glance, wouldn’t bother Voldemort, who believes that he is “much, much more than a man.”<sup>xlii</sup> Voldemort sees losing his humanity as a form of gaining power. If only Voldemort would have read “The Warlock’s Hairy Heart” in *The Tales of Beedle the Bard*, he would know that this

could only end in his own destruction. Like the Warlock, Voldemort chose a path that can only destroy his soul, because he has ceased to function as human being and has become more “beast-like” in his inhumanity.<sup>xliii</sup>

Voldemort’s use of dark magic, which he is convinced is true power, is dehumanizing, and regardless of what he thinks, dehumanization makes him less and not more. The more he embraces this kind of power the more he warps his soul. Voldemort brags to Dumbledore, “I have pushed the boundaries of magic further, perhaps, than they have ever been pushed.”<sup>xliv</sup> Dumbledore, in response, subtly rebukes him: “Of some kinds of magic.” “Of others, you remain...forgive me...woefully ignorant.”<sup>xlv</sup> Voldemort, of course, doesn’t even consider the possibility that he is ignorant of powerful magic. He may fear Dumbledore, but he doesn’t respect him enough to think he could be right. So Voldemort retorts, “But nothing I have seen in the world has supported your famous pronouncements that love is more powerful than my kind of magic, Dumbledore.”<sup>xlvi</sup> But Voldemort could never actually see the power of love; he may have eyes, but he cannot see. Voldemort is blind to reality, and fantasy is never interested in love but only in its counterfeits.

### *The Rejection of Love*

One of the interesting features of “The Warlock’s Hairy Heart,” is that seeing people fall in love is what made the Warlock want to lock his heart away.<sup>xlvii</sup> Even in his youth, the Warlock viewed romantic love as too childish and foolish for him. He wanted to be serious, and he wanted to be strong, and romantic love seemed to undermine both of those things. Once again, Voldemort follows suit. Voldemort’s turn to power means that he is unable to have friends, know love, or truly be known by any other. Voldemort’s faith in power means he is unable to see the true power that can be found in a child –

and maybe *especially* in a child. For Voldemort, childish ways are just that, *childish*, and he fails to recognize that they speak into the deepest sort of magic.

Part of Voldemort's failure, as we have seen, is his confusion about death: that immortality entails conquering death.<sup>xlvi</sup> But, as the "Tale of the Three Brothers" shows so well, this lie comes from Death itself to fool the foolish. Voldemort can grasp the most difficult of magic, but in prizing that, he fails to be like a child and understand the truths that children's tales provide. He has failed to understand "the ethics of Elfland," as Chesterton wrote, where our sin makes us old and "our Father is younger than we."<sup>xlvi</sup> Voldemort misses the profundity of being a child and the way of a child, and because he has "grown old," he fails to understand the simple truths of wisdom. Because of his folly, he makes mistakes that are profoundly obvious. The notion that he could defeat death is of the basest grandiosity, and yet he is too hard-hearted to embrace reality. He has become convinced, in a primal way, that he can craft life in autonomy and strength, and so he disintegrates his self, like the Warlock with the hairy heart, and darkness consumes him.

When Jesus says, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 18:4), he is pointing to what it entails to embrace his reign. The reign of Jesus necessitates humility and a rejection of worldly power, a power aligned with Chesterton's notion of "growing old." Rather, Jesus seeks those with a "childlike faith." But for Voldemort, being childlike would be just as foolish as being humble. When Harry meets Voldemort in the Chamber of Secrets, Voldemort can't withhold his curiosity and desire to know how he had been beaten twice *by a child*. Voldemort, although brilliant and highly nuanced in his understanding of magic, chose to believe something foolish when Harry

suggested it. Harry suggested that his ability to defeat Voldemort was a fluke. This plays into Voldemort's assumptions. He assumes that Harry could not possibly have any power he doesn't, because Voldemort has bought into his own marketing – he believes he is the greatest wizard ever. He is foolish enough to believe that his downfall wasn't because of powerful magic, at least not truly powerful, and is ready to chock it up to "lucky chance."<sup>1</sup> But he loses again. Voldemort, who has Harry's wand and a basilisk, still cannot defeat Harry who only has a Phoenix and the Sorting Hat! In Harry's weakness he knows strength because his weakness is bound up in love, loyalty, and sacrifice. Because of his folly, Voldemort always over-values his own strength and under-appreciates the strengths of others, causing him to miss the power known in weakness for love entirely. In the biblical idiom, he has eyes but he cannot see, and he has ears but he cannot hear. He has truly become snakelike and therefore cannot embrace reality.

By accepting the way of dehumanization, what Voldemort doesn't seem to notice is that he has defiled his soul. In his quest to protect it, he so wrecks his soul that it is no longer truly human. This is why, when Voldemort enters into Harry he has to flee, because his evil cannot handle the purity of Harry's heart. Like the Warlock from "The Warlock's Hairy Heart," who puts his heart – now marked by dark magic – back into his chest only to realize that he cannot survive with it there, Voldemort fails to understand the laws of purity and uncleanness, of what is human and what is dehumanized. The heart of this Warlock, Dumbledore tells us, has become hairy in the story to symbolize its descent to beasthood.<sup>li</sup> In this way, Voldemort fails to meditate upon Adalbert Waffling's first fundamental law of magic, "*Tamper with the deepest mysteries – the source of life, the essence of self – only if prepared for consequences of the most extreme and dangerous kind.*"<sup>lii</sup> In Dumbledore's personal notes on this tale, he writes, "And

sure enough, in seeking to become super-human this foolhardy young man renders himself inhuman.”<sup>liii</sup> This is, of course, Voldemort’s downfall. In seeking to be super-human, Voldemort loses his humanity and becomes less than human. Even though he believes he is becoming more, he fails to see reality and has defiled his being. This is why Voldemort is shown in the narrative to become less and less human; his nose became “snake-like” and his eyes are red, both unveiling the disintegration of his humanity.<sup>liv</sup>

### **Standing Firm: The Way of Harry**

It would be too simplistic to assert that Harry always embodied the way of love. In fact, he was continually tempted by the other way. Harry repeatedly judges power according to the kind of power Voldemort has, and therefore he under-appreciates how powerful he really is.<sup>lv</sup> Harry has a tendency to isolate himself, to wall himself off from those who love him, and to try to absorb the pain and suffering so others don’t have to. That last notion points out how blinding love can be, a lesson Harry must learn in parenting. But all this really shows is that Harry, like all true heroes, is a broken person seeking the way of life. Harry is far from perfect, but as the narrative highlights, he chooses to walk in the way of love and reject the way of darkness.

In Ephesians 6, the Apostle Paul describes the armor of God. In the day of evil, Paul explains, we need the whole armor of God, that we “may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.” (Eph. 6:11, 13) The armor of God allows someone to stand firm against evil, not defeating it per se, but exposing its superficiality, its failures, and illumining that darkness has no substance of its own. The armor of God is: truth, the Gospel of peace, faith, salvation, and an embrace of the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. His encouragement to pick up this sword is not followed by an exhortation to wield it in battle but to pray. The sword of the Spirit, we come

to know, first must be wielded against its holder, and not simply wielded by its holder (Heb. 4:12-13). To put on the armor of God one must first be confronted by God and by the truth, that they may come to be the kinds of people who stand firm. The Word of God, in this sense, is similar to the Sword of Gryffindor – it comes to those worthy to wield it. The Sword of the Spirit, in contrast, requires that one stand with heart open as it slices open the depths of one’s soul – “piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give an account.” (Heb. 4:12-13) The Scriptures are, in a sense, similar to the Mirror of Erised. If we stand before Scripture, open to its penetrating glare, it unveils the desires of our heart. Scripture exposes what we really want, and it calls us into wisdom. This work by the Scriptures is a work of the Spirit (it is his sword after all), and it is this work that forms us to stand firm in the day of evil. In Harry’s life, we see this kind of journey. It is a broken journey, no doubt, but it is a journey of one who has been laid naked and exposed to the truth, and refusing to grow weary, has chosen instead the way of light against the darkness.

If Voldemort embodies the failure narrated in “The Warlock’s Hairy Heart,” Harry does the opposite. The Warlock seeks to protect himself by defiling an aspect of his humanity – locking it away so that it cannot be accessed. But Harry refuses to do so. With every death Harry experiences, he still refuses to give up on love, friendship, and hope because he has learned that this is the only way to live. To give up on love, friendship, and hope would be a failure to recognize what death is. If death is inevitable, and if we are being formed for life after death, then allowing death to take away what is meaningful in life is foolishness. In accepting this way, he is doing the opposite of what

Voldemort did, and instead of warping his soul, he is purifying it in love. This purification is painful at times, in ways most of his friends cannot fully understand, but this purification gives him real power.

One way that Harry's purification gives him power is in being able to read Voldemort's mind when Voldemort won't do the same in return. For a while, Voldemort did insert thoughts and dreams into the mind of Harry, but then something changed. Voldemort came to fear the connection he shared with Harry. Dumbledore explains, "Not so long ago he [Voldemort] had one small taste of what truly sharing Harry's mind means to him. It was pain such as he has never experienced. He will not try to possess Harry again, I am sure of it."<sup>lvi</sup> Dumbledore continues to explain why this is, "Lord Voldemort's soul, maimed as it is, cannot bear close contact with a soul like Harry's."<sup>lvii</sup> Like the Warlock's heart, Voldemort had become so warped by darkness that he could not handle contact with humanity. Like the sacrificial love from Harry's mother, purity is so antithetical to what Voldemort has become that it acts like a weapon against him. But purity comes at a price, as Harry comes to realize.

Because Harry accepts the way of love, he also must accept the way of weakness. It means that he continues to open his heart to let people in who he has to watch die. It means that he loves dearly people he cannot always protect, and so he is left to wonder if they are safe. It means that he cannot wield the same kind of tools as the death-eaters (even though, at times, he does digress and use the *crucio* curse),<sup>lviii</sup> because he has to take into account the formation of his soul. To enact good magic one must have a clean heart. To walk in the way of the light and really grasp the power this way provides, one must have a soul of light. The same is true for darkness. The illegal curses cannot be cast with righteous anger, we are told.<sup>lix</sup> To use the biblical language, there is the way of the spirit, and there is the way of the flesh, whatever is sown in the spirit will be

reaped in the spirit, whatever is sown in the flesh will be reaped in the flesh (Gal. 6:8). For Harry, he must sow his magic in light so that he can reap the power of the way of light.

Just as the Apostle Paul talks about the wisdom of the cross that will be seen as foolishness by the world, so too does Dumbledore claim they will be seen as the “fools who love.”<sup>lx</sup> Whereas Voldemort is unable to believe that anything is worse than bodily pain or death, Dumbledore and Harry come to recognize that suffering is part of what makes one human, and to lose that ability would entail losing their humanity.<sup>lxi</sup> Losing one’s humanity is not only becoming less, they recognize, it is losing faith in the true system of power in the world and is a failure to recognize what death is. Death is, for the way of love, merely the forerunner to resurrection. This is the way of the Phoenix. This means that it is not simply what one does that matters, it is who they are becoming that is important. The heavenly scene at King’s Cross Station reveals that everyone is being formed for another world based on what forms our soul here and now. The way of love is the way to become weighty of soul; it is trusting that love is the economy of eternity and therefore is the one power that lasts forever. (1 Cor. 13:13)

The power that Harry embodies is a power of the heart.<sup>lxii</sup> Evil power cannot make sense of the heart because it is focused on love, sacrifice, and faithfulness. Evil power does not function according to the power structures of reality, and so it cannot fathom the powers of love. This is why, for Rowling, those who walk the way from darkness are always, to one degree or another, racists, whereas those walking the way of light see the value of all creatures. Harry’s interaction with and respect of the house elves, for instance, has a profound impact on his mission. Voldemort never considers how powerful the magic of the house elves really is, and so he never actually considers that they

could be important. But without the house elves Harry would have lost. Harry's greatness does not go unnoticed by these other magical creatures. In doing so, Harry, like Dumbledore before him, is bearing witness to the way against the powers of evil. The way against evil is to deny the ways and ends of evil in their entirety. Love therefore, does not make someone weak, but it makes someone weighty. This is precisely what Voldemort never understands.

Harry wins, in the end, because his friends stick by him when Voldemort's followers scatter. Harry wins because "lesser" creatures, who knew Harry's love and acceptance, charged into battle to fight for his cause. Harry won, ultimately, because he was able to break the power of death that Voldemort wielded so strongly by giving himself in love. This is particularly important for understanding the way of Harry. Harry's power of love drove him to never give up and to not fear the ways of darkness that Voldemort used to manipulate the masses. "Perfect love casts out fear," Scripture tells us (1 John 4:18). But Harry's love does more than this. It does propel him to confront evil, and that aspect of Harry's love should never be underestimated. It is precisely what many of Voldemort's followers or students of Slytherin House don't have. They don't have a reason to continue on that is as deeply powerful as love. But ultimately, the power of love is found in sacrifice for another. It is not only love as a sacrifice but specifically sacrificing oneself *for another* in love that is so powerful. We see how this sacrificial love protected Harry after his mother died for him. Voldemort never comes to understand the power of this sacrificial love, because, as Dumbledore explains, "That which Voldemort does not value, he takes no trouble to comprehend."<sup>lxiii</sup> This lack of knowledge, this profound ignorance, is even more devastating to Voldemort because he is convinced that he has unearthed the depths of the most powerful magic. He was wrong. When he cast the killing curse upon Harry in the woods,

Harry was dying for his friends. From that moment on Voldemort's way of death died. It was drained of its power. Voldemort's spells are no longer binding on those Harry died for. Voldemort isn't able to torture them or defeat them.<sup>lxiv</sup>

In the end, by walking in the way of Dumbledore, Harry is able to conquer death. Death no longer has dominion over him because it had lost all of its power. Ironically, Death never had a stronger grip on anyone than he had on Voldemort. Voldemort was living out a fool's dream and wielded a power that was powerless in the end. Love drove Harry to enact magic more powerful than Voldemort could ever dream. But it was never the kind of power that would have enticed him. Voldemort would have been disgusted by it – offended by its weakness and uselessness. But at its core, this magic made Harry and his friends more human, and maybe even exceptionally human. Voldemort was too busy trying to lose his humanity to notice that being truly human is where all the real power resides for the witch and wizard.

## Chapter 6:

### The Failure of Victory

What Dumbledore recognized, with few others, is that Voldemort's initial demise was not a real victory for good. Dumbledore knew that Voldemort hadn't been destroyed, and he suspected that he was still seeking power. But more so, Dumbledore recognized that his fellow wizards and witches had never fully rejected the way of Voldemort. This became clear with how the ministry sought out and captured death-eaters, often with little regard for virtue or legalities. There was a failure by the ministry to recognize that virtuous ends require virtuous means. Like our own governments, who often bend ethical principles like torture if they think it will get them what they want, several characters seek to reject the option between light and darkness and attempt to live in the grey.

No other character better represents this folly, perhaps, than Barty Crouch. Barty always rejected the dark side, we are told, but he was also power-hungry.<sup>lxv</sup> This is an interesting contrast. He seemed to reject the ends but not the means of darkness, and doing so created a deep tension for him. He sought to use evil ends to justify good means, something that serves as a sign of those embodying folly because they are blinded to the true good.<sup>lxvi</sup> It is unclear if his power-hungry nature, or just his failure to love, helped create the context for his son to become a death-eater and eventually murder him.<sup>lxvii</sup> But it does expose that he had been marked by the way of death and dehumanization. Crouch serves to highlight a middle way that is represented by several characters in the narrative. The middle way seeks to reject the way of evil, but it also fails to accept the way of love. The middle way seeks to walk as if they

didn't have to choose one side or the other, and in the end, this way slowly destroys them as well.

### **The Folly of the Middle Way**

At the heart of the notion of the two ways is that we all have to put our faith in something. For those who reject the two ways, they are always enticed by the idea that they can generate an alternative. This third way is usually an attempt to follow whatever cultural axioms are accepted, whether virtuous or not, in an attempt to construct life on one's own terms. The question of virtue becomes irrelevant, replaced by superficial questions concerning pragmatics. What is good is reduced down to whatever works for me. In the case of Barty, his grandiosity and quest for power led him to do evil things in the name of good.

As noted earlier, Rowling's narrative reads like the Gospel accounts in Scripture. In these accounts of Jesus' life, we are presented with three groups: those who follow Jesus, those who want to kill him, and those who aren't sure what to do with him but are interested enough to listen. This does something to the reader. As you read the Gospels you are pulled into the crowd listening, and you have to discern who you stand alongside. Are you standing with Peter and the rest of the disciples, or with the Pharisees? Are you standing with the people who are just curious and looking to get some free bread? Are you among Jesus' followers who leave when he starts making difficult claims? (John 6:35-59) In a similar kind of way, there are several aspects of Rowling's narrative that call the reader to discern where they stand. One might ask what house they would be sorted into by the Sorting Hat based on the values of each house. One might start thinking about which circle of friends they would be in, or, if they were one of Harry's friends, who would they be? More than anything else though, one is called to wonder which side they would be on. If they were in the narrative, would they be willing to suffer and die to walk in the way of

love? Would they side with darkness and seek the way of power and domination? Or, maybe more poignantly, would they be the kind of person who would seek the middle way?

*The Ministry of Magic and the Subtleties of Evil*

The middle way is enfolded well by the ministry of magic. Just like our own world, the politics of the magical world seem to be saturated with those longing for power whose souls are filled with darkness. Even after Voldemort's initial reign no one had stopped the way from below from gaining power in subtle ways. Fudge is blinded by fear and therefore capitulates to ways of power and control that only serve evil. Dolores Umbridge is a racist, power-hungry bureaucrat who continually justifies evil because she thinks it is what is best for the ministry, even turning to illegal curses by convincing herself it was for "Ministry security" (under the umbrella of "enhanced interrogation" no doubt).<sup>lxviii</sup> She is, in many ways, the counterpart to Voldemort. Whereas Voldemort's evil is beyond the bounds of society, Umbridge's evil works itself out from within "polite society."<sup>lxix</sup> She is the palatable version of Voldemort that many wizards and witches were too afraid to stand up to.

There are several main characters, and a legion of minor characters, who waffle between the two ways. These characters speak to those of us who wonder how we would respond to the call of death. The middle way fails to understand resurrection, and so there is still a subtle attempt to manipulate reality by utilizing evil for good. Most of the people in the narrative who walk in the middle way do desire good on some level. Their problem is that they still believe in the same *kind* of power system as Voldemort, and because of this, they long to have it. Two examples come to the surface rather quickly: Slughorn and Percy.

Horace Slughorn likes comfort, and he likes the company of powerful people.<sup>lxx</sup> Slughorn does not want to be troubled by wielding power directly, it seems too messy for him. Rather, he wants to have power secondhand through the people he knows and influences.<sup>lxxi</sup> Like Voldemort, Slughorn likes to collect valuable objects, but for Slughorn this usually means contacts with people rather than actual objects.<sup>lxxii</sup> This vision of power led Horace to rank students according to their importance. Like Voldemort, Horace only seemed to see things according to a scale of power. When pressure builds and he is forced to pick a side, what comes out of his heart is fear and a lack of courage. These attributes characterize Slytherin House during Harry's time at Hogwarts, although, as we will see below, these characteristics are the opposite of what Slytherin should be. In the end, Slughorn chooses the side of Harry, but it never becomes clear if he chooses the way of love.

The more obvious example of the folly of the middle way is Percy. Percy, one of the Weasley brothers, is the family kiss-up. Percy is incredibly impressed with himself and is somewhat embarrassed about his family. To make up for their supposed lack, particularly their lack of ambition, Percy sets his eyes on the ministry and its power. As Ron disparages his brother, Hermione interrupts, "Percy would never throw any of his family to the dementors." But Ron responds, "I don't know," "If he thought we were standing in the way of his career...Percy's really ambitious, you know..."<sup>lxxiii</sup> In doing so, Percy rejects, explicitly, the way of Dumbledore and Harry and therefore rejects his family. Regardless of what his decisions do to others, or even how obviously he is blinded by power, he refuses to relent, only coming back at the very end. Percy is redeemed, however, when he opens his heart to his brothers only to witness Fred's death.<sup>lxxiv</sup> Only then do we see the

redemption of Percy, not only when he repents, but when he can suffer the loss of his family.

There are, of course, other people who, for one reason or another, are tossed back and forth between the two ways. There are the Malfoys, particularly Draco, who are close enough to Voldemort to witness the degree of his evil. Draco, in particular, also witnesses Harry's mercy, and in that mercy he begins to see the nature of true power. Peter Pettigrew is another figure whose lack of courage leaves him vulnerable to Voldemort. Peter's warmth toward Harry leads to his death, and in death one gets the sense that he repents. With all of these figures we find a lack of courage and a desire to thrive without having to put themselves on the line. Ultimately, they lack loyalty and so they never seem to belong anywhere.

### **Power at Rest**

Instead of the middle way, which is the lukewarm reality of people who would rather not commit, there are several characters who embody power at rest. Their power is at rest because they do not often wield it. In fact, by all worldly accounts, they are incredibly weak. Like Dostoevsky, who uses prostitutes in his narratives to expose grace,<sup>lxv</sup> Rowling uses figures who exude one reality by personifying another. She shows that those who are ignored, broken, and weak by worldly standards have a hidden power within that shines through in love. But this power is often power at rest, just waiting to be activated. By giving themselves to the way of power in weakness for love, they trust that when the time comes they will be ready to employ it for the sake of the good.

This is one of the more difficult realities we all must come to face. Our task in life is not merely to ready ourselves for what we know is coming. We must do that, and we should do it well, but that isn't all we are required to do, especially as Christians. Christians are required to ready themselves for what

they do not expect. We are called to be formed in such a way that when we are put in any circumstance we can respond in the way of love. This means our life should always have a power at rest within us, just waiting to be actualized. Like Dietrich Bonhoeffer who was faced with the Nazi regime and an opportunity to flee, choosing instead to defy the Nazi empire by bearing his cross, we must become formed to accept the call upon our lives, whatever that may be. We must become like Harry, who is able to walk to his own death because he has become the kind of person who can accept what the way of love entails. We are all called to be formed according to the way of true power, but the only way this happens is if we give ourselves to the hiddenness of love.

Three characters embody this hiddenness of love incredibly well: Hagrid, Luna, and Neville. Each of these three share something with Harry and Dumbledore: they all have suffered deeply, they are all rejected by their peers, and they all have suffered specifically in their immediate family. This is why Hermione and Ron don't quite seem to embrace them the way Harry does. There is a kinship between Harry and these three that is deeper than Ron or Hermione can understand. In the end, all three of them become central characters for Harry in his quest. Without Neville killing the snake, Harry and his resistance would fail (as we learn in *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*). Without Hagrid, it is unclear if Harry would have made it out of the dogfight between the Order of the Phoenix and the Death-Eaters. Without Luna, Harry might have strayed into isolation, forgetting that Voldemort was seeking to cut him off from his friends.

These three figures all embody a kind of power in weakness for love. None of them have friends, at least not really, and yet all prove incredibly loyal. Neville is pushed around and refuses to stand up for himself, oozing his cowardly persona on anyone who is willing to notice, and yet in the end is

courageous enough to pull the Sword of Gryffindor out of the Sorting Hat and wield it against the snake (not to mention his leadership in the resistance at Hogwarts once it had fallen into the hands of the Death-eaters). Hagrid, furthermore, is always a veritable paradox of opposites: he is humongous and yet childlike and emotional; he has power like the death-eaters long for (because of his giant background), and yet he rarely wielded it; and he loves the unlovable (monsters) and could see beauty where no one else could. Hagrid knew rejection and because of this was incredibly accepting, always having a sensitive heart and abounding in loyalty and grace. Maybe most importantly, Hagrid could have been angry – he could have held a grudge against Hogwarts and the system for trusting Tom Riddle’s word against his, for their assumptions that he had done wrong because he was part-giant – and yet he forgave and softened his heart. He was, in many ways, like Dumbledore in this regard. He wouldn’t hesitate to slam the ministry or name evil when he saw it, forgiveness and soft-heartedness are not the same as ignorance, but he refused to let it define him. Hagrid had the kind of strength the world longs for, but he didn’t use it to find value or power; Hagrid turned instead toward power in weakness for love.

Each of these characters rejected the middle way for the way of love even when it didn’t seem to serve them well. Neville, Luna, and Hagrid weren’t gaining power with the way they were living. For Neville and Luna specifically, they could easily have sought out influence by trying to fit in, but instead they consistently stood up for what they believed. For Neville, that meant standing up to his friends Harry, Ron, and Hermione in first year to try and keep them out of trouble, and for Luna that meant standing by what you believe even when it is mocked and rejected. In many ways, for each of these characters, they had been too touched by suffering to have been tempted by the middle

way. It was as if they had seen too much of the world to think that the middle way was meaningful. Hagrid had witnessed the rise and lies of Voldemort, Neville had seen evil wielded against his family, and Luna saw the power of magic take her mother from her, and they all recognized that the way of love and virtue was more fundamental. There was something deeper, something greater, something worth dying for, that they wanted to invest in, and it had nothing to do with the kind of weak-willed narcissism of the Malfoys or the ministry politicians. They may have been rejected by their peers, but they were on the road to becoming more and more human, and that was all they needed.

## Chapter 7:

### The Way of Hiddenness

Next to death, Voldemort's other great fear is mediocrity. Voldemort wants to be great, and, maybe just as much, he wants to be known for his greatness. Voldemort changes his name from Tom Riddle because he did not like how normal it was. He does not like being linked with the mundane. This is why he chooses famous magical objects to make into Horcruxes rather than something else. He wants to avoid linking himself to something that is not great.

Ironically, the death-eaters, the very group that comes to define Voldemort's reign, is full of the mediocre. They might not be mundane – many of them are high society – they are, nonetheless, mediocre. There are a couple of great wizards among them, but that is not their defining feature. Like all celebrities, Voldemort's followers have different goals than he does, but they only really want to bask in his radiance. This is part of the reason why they are all spineless. Few of his followers share his grandiosity or fortitude, but they do share his fear of the mundane. These folks want power and they want to be known, and so they grasp onto Voldemort hoping he will give it to them. In this sense, the Death-eaters are all versions of Gilderoy Lockhart, the vain wizard who is more interested in celebrity than anything else.<sup>lxxvi</sup> Whereas Lockhart is a twisted version of a human being, they are even more twisted versions of him. Instead of claiming to be great and lying about it, they simply try to attach themselves to greatness (even if Voldemort's greatness is evil).

Whereas Lockhart's vanity simply stunts his depth as a person and fuels his narcissism, to be close to Voldemort was a much greater price to pay. It meant to suffer, and if one were on the margins of his cadre, it meant that you

always lived in fear. It is hard to know which is better, to be in his inner-circle, who are often tortured if they do not meet his expectations but who have proven themselves enough not to be killed, or on the margins, who are only kept around if they continue to do what he wants (and do it in a way that is up to his expectations). Both groups can assume that Voldemort will use them until he is done and then kill them. The few who actually believe fully in the way and power of darkness, like Bellatrix, are so warped in their souls that Voldemort's way is the only way that makes sense. But for most of the death-eaters, like the Malfoys, who are narcissistic and broken enough to wield darkness, they do not actually believe in its way. They are willing to do whatever it takes to further their own desires. But they are trapped now in the wake of Voldemort, who makes his disciples suffer almost as much as his enemies. Because of this, there is no real hope in them.

What folks like the Malfoys wanted was to win at life. They wanted to be great, and they enjoyed pointing out how much more important, powerful, and wealthy they were than others. By all worldly accounts, they seemed to be winning. But there was no virtue in them. They couldn't give themselves to anything weighty, because they had put all their hope in becoming great by any means necessary. But greatness, in itself, is nothing. It is mere celebrity. Without virtue, greatness has nothing to offer. This is one of the ironies about Voldemort. Even though Voldemort is the famous dark wizard, he still desires the celebrity that Harry has. Because Harry, in weakness as a child, defeated Voldemort, Harry's celebrity was greater. It is ironic that Harry's celebrity rests upon Voldemort's. If Voldemort wasn't famous, Harry's survival would have been interesting but forgotten. Harry is remembered because of Voldemort's greatness, and yet his continued survival is a beacon of hope in the collapsing darkness of hopelessness.

Voldemort, in his folly, never seems to understand how meaningless his quest for celebrity really is, and he never understands that Harry doesn't even want it. Voldemort can only assume that Harry relishes in his celebrity, because Voldemort cannot understand other systems of power. But in reality, Harry would give anything to remain hidden, because in hiddenness he could be normal – the very thing that Voldemort is afraid of. Voldemort only remains hidden for the purpose of being seen. Like a snake that hides in order to strike more lethally, Voldemort hides to survive and gain power. Darkness is always afraid of light. But there is a different sort of hiddenness – a hiddenness driven by love – that recognizes an entirely different power structure. This kind of hiddenness recognizes that celebrity and greatness are meaningless without love. In fact, those who walk in the way of love will come to see celebrity as the meaningless longing of a lost people – people seeking to attach themselves to something that lasts, without actually seeking the one thing that does.

### **The Hidden Way of Snape**

The way of hiddenness is perhaps best personified by Snape. Snape's hiddenness leads Harry to assume that he is evil, and evil seeks hiddenness so as to not be exposed by the light. But in the end, Harry comes to understand that Snape's hiddenness is much deeper and more profound than that. Snape's hiddenness is driven by love. In Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's words, "If we could read the secret history of our enemies, we should find in each person's life sorry and suffering enough to disarm all hostility."<sup>lxxvii</sup> Harry witnessed Snape's secret history in the Pensieve, and that is what allowed Harry to no longer see him as an enemy but as an ally. Even more so, Harry was finally able to see Snape's sorrow and the love he harbored for Harry's mother Lily.

But for the bulk of the narrative, until the very end in fact, Harry wasn't able to see any goodness in Snape. Harry allowed himself to think he knew

better than Dumbledore and so he allowed his assumptions about Snape to fester. But along the way Harry was confronted with some deep questions about Snape. Harry knew that his own past was actually more like Snape's than his own father's history, and this troubled him deeply.<sup>lxxviii</sup> But perhaps more than anything else they shared, Harry and Snape viewed each other with equal pessimism. Both Harry and Snape saw in the other what they wanted to see. Snape saw an arrogant, talentless child who was exactly like his father, and Harry saw an arrogant, angry, death-eater who had never left his old ways behind. Both were wrong. Both were unable to recognize that they shared a mutual love, and in their hurt they used their hatred to fuel their assumptions.

### *Love in Darkness*

From one angle, we might say that Snape embodied, even more than Harry, the way of love. This is true, in one sense. Everything Snape did was out of his love for Lily Potter. His love was a selfless love, and so he walked into the deepest and darkest places driven only by his love for her. But because of his love for her, and because he had to play a particularly difficult role in the fight against Voldemort, he was never able to know the fruit of that love. In other words, Snape had to walk the path of evil in order to follow in the way of love.

It is particularly difficult to find parallels to Snape's life in the power-structure expositied in Scripture, but it is there. There is a distinctively Jesus-likeness to Snape. Jesus, although he was without sin, became sin for the sake of his people (2 Cor. 5:21). There is also a Paul-likeness, who would rather be cursed and cut-off, than to watch his people perish (Rom. 9:3). Snape embodies these inclinations in profound ways. To play the role of a death-eater is not simply good acting and savvy occlumency. One has to be able to wield curses out of true anger, because righteous anger isn't enough. For Snape to love Lily, he has to embody hate. For Snape to help unravel evil, he has to enter it fully.

To truly fool Voldemort, Snape had to take into his soul a darkness that was antithetical to his love. Like the Warlock with the hairy heart, Snape had to lock his heart away, not to reject love, but to follow his love. This becomes evident when Dumbledore makes Snape promise to kill him instead of allowing Draco to commit murder. Dumbledore is worried that Draco may defile his soul in the act of killing him, to which Snape replies, “And my soul, Dumbledore? Mine?”<sup>lxxxix</sup>

Snape embodied the biblical axiom, “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, . . . For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (Matt. 6:19-21) Snape’s treasure was with Lily, and his heart had been formed by his love for her; he had already died, and his life was hidden in another place. So instead of giving himself to worldly power, where “moth and rust destroy,” he gave himself to that love. In other words, while Snape had to defile his soul in this world, he was purifying it in the world to come. Where Voldemort became more powerful on earth, and yet in the other world he withered, Snape, in a sense, did the opposite. This is why Dumbledore responds, “You alone know whether it will harm your soul to help an old man avoid pain and humiliation.”<sup>lxxx</sup> So instead of being filled with love and light in this world, Snape trusted that if he fools darkness for the sake of love he will thrive in the world to come. But that kind of journey comes at a cost.

Jesus claims, “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.” (John 15:13) What Harry comes to realize, after Snape’s death, is that he gave himself to death for the cause of good because of his love for Lily. Snape had already died, in a sense, the night that Voldemort killed Lily. He had already faced death, and he was wise enough to know death cannot be

defeated. So Snape, in utter secrecy, walked the way of life by embodying a life of darkness for the sake of exposing it to the light when the proper time came. As Harry comes to say of Snape, “he was probably the bravest man I ever knew.”<sup>lxxxix</sup> Snape bravely walked through darkness in this world so that he could be formed by light in the next.

### **The Way from Above**

Few passages of Scripture narrate the two ways more explicitly than James 3:13-18. In this section, James names the way from below as “earthly, unspiritual, and demonic,” where we get the threefold category of evil as the world, the flesh, and the devil. What is particularly curious is that James names only two characteristics of the world, the flesh, and the devil. At first glance, one would assume something like murder as an appropriate category that would define evil’s way of power, but James chooses selfish ambition and jealousy. Ambition is one of Slytherin’s main values, and it is this way of evil that comes to characterize Slytherin. But that was never supposed to be the way. Slytherin is represented in its best form by Snape, who embodied all of Slytherin’s virtues, but who did so because of love. This led Snape to accept ambition, but it was ambition for the service of others. This was the true calling of Slytherin in the pantheon of Hogwart’s houses, and it is this way that would allow Slytherin to unite with the other houses. This is why, after Snape’s selfless act, we are told, “McGonagall had replaced the House tables, but nobody was sitting according to House anymore: All were jumbled together, teachers and pupils, ghosts and parents, centaurs and house-elves, and Firenze lay recovering in a corner, . . .”<sup>lxxxii</sup> Together they found unity, where even the Malfoys hung around, not wanting to leave the draw of acceptance and love.<sup>lxxxiii</sup>

If we compare this act with Slytherin’s most notorious celebrity, Voldemort, the differences are obvious. Voldemort also wanted to get rid of

the lack of unity at Hogwarts, but he wanted to do it by force. “‘There will be no more Sorting at Hogwarts School,’ said Voldemort. ‘There will be no more Houses. The emblem, shield, and colors of my noble ancestor, Salazar Slytherin, will suffice for everyone.’”<sup>lxxxiv</sup> What Snape did in his death was embody a different sort of unity; sacrificing himself for the sake of love. Instead of embodying ambition with weakness and fear, as Slytherins had become known for, Snape showed the true way Slytherin could function for unity at Hogwarts: Ambition for love, in the courage of love. Unfortunately, ambition rarely seeks the way of love, and Slytherin House’s relation to the other Houses at Hogwarts shows how quickly ambition leads to division.

The wisdom from above, as James so helpfully narrates, is “‘first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere,’” and this way leads to peace. This is the way of Dumbledore, and it is the way Harry seeks to walk in (however imperfectly). This way from above is the way to become weighty of soul, as one who knows that resurrection life is more meaningful than our life here and now. This way recognizes that characteristics like gentleness are not signs of weakness but signs of true power, and that mercy is the way of reality. The way from below, in contrast, is not only the way of evil, it is the way of fantasy. This way seeks to conform to a world that isn’t real, and therefore it fails to provide life. In Jesus we discover that the world functions according to a very different system of power than we might have thought at first glance. This system is embodied by Jesus, and Jesus calls his followers to bear witness to this way in their own lives. The narrative of Harry Potter points us to this reality, if only we have eyes to see and ears to hear.

What the Harry Potter narrative is not able to express, because of its limitations as a narrative, is the story of Jesus specifically. It is one thing to have

representatives of Jesus, or Jesus-types in the narrative, but Jesus is an entirely different thing. The whole of the Gospel revolves around Jesus. The Good News is Jesus himself, who came in the flesh to take on sin and death and rose from the dead to ascend to the Father so that we can have access to God (Eph. 2:18). Christianity is not simply about a way or path of living, as if Christianity were simply an ethic and Jesus was primarily an example. Christianity is about a way, but this “way” is a person. “I am the way,” Jesus proclaimed in John 14:6. Our calling as Christians, therefore, is never simply imitation (even though we are called to imitation). Our calling is to partake in the life of the Son who walked the way of love. As we abide in him, we bear his fruit and the fruit of his way (John 15).

Therefore, what was written on James and Lily’s grave is true, “The last enemy to be defeated is death” (1 Cor. 15:26). That is not the question. The question concerns how death is defeated. In the death of Christ death has been undermined, but it has yet to be annihilated. For Christ “must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet” (1 Cor. 15:25). For the Christian, to reject death and embrace eternal life, therefore, is not to fight death but to embrace the one who has defeated it already: Christ. As Scripture declares:

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. (Romans 6:5-11)

Death no longer has mastery over us because Christ has defeated death.

Therefore, in Christ, we have died: “For you have died, and your life is hidden

with Christ in God” (Col. 3:3). The life of a Christian is no longer under the slavery of death, but is now lived in the freedom of life: “And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.” (1 John 5:11-12)

In this sense, Christians are those who have embraced, not simply a message, but Christ himself. By abiding in and trusting in Christ, Christians are those who are being formed into his way. His love does not leave us untouched but now forms us according to the way of life that he embodied. Therefore, the reality of Jesus’ descent into the flesh and the continued descent to the cross unveils the contours of Christian power. This is the power that is so difficult to trust in this world. But we must never forget that this is true power. No matter how strong other names may appear, or, like the name Voldemort, how much fear they may strike in us, the name of Jesus is “the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth (Phil. 2:9-10). Furthermore, while we know that our struggle is not “against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness,” we also remember that Jesus has sat down at the right hand of God, “far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.” (Eph. 1:21) So even at the naming of the Voldemort’s of our age, we can remember that Jesus’ name is above every name that is named.

While it isn’t possible to flesh out the way from above here more than we have, Jamin Goggin and I have sought to do so in the book *The Way of the Dragon or the Way of the Lamb: Searching for Jesus’ Path of Power in a Church that has Abandoned It* (Thomas Nelson, 2017). In this book we travel around seeking out

the way of wisdom from folks who have lived this way for decades. In doing so, we are confronted with serious questions about the way of love, and we seek Scripture to give an account of what Jesus' way entails. As we attend to the narrative of Harry Potter, my hope is that this will turn us to deeper questions about Jesus' way of power in the world. Jamin and I hope that our book will serve as a fruitful resource for living in that way.

## Praise for *The Way of the Dragon or the Way of the Lamb*

“This is a book every Christian leader needs to read and soon. Nuanced, wise, pastoral, and yet challenging, *The Way of the Dragon or The Way of the Lamb* will shape more than your leadership and your ministry, it will shape your soul and reorient you to following Jesus. In our day and age, this is a message we need desperately.”

- Sarah Bessey, author of *Out of Sorts: Making Peace with an Evolving Faith* and *Jesus Feminist*

“Jamin and Kyle have their finger on the pulse of something significant here. I have often been concerned with the current view of strength and power as it is currently understood and embraced in our culture. The Church must see power for what it is and where it’s found...true Holy Spirit power is found in weakness and not brazen human strength and skill. It is imperative for us to understand and embrace this. *Way of the Dragon Way of the Lamb* will help us all along the path to pursuing the way of the lamb.”

- Matt Chandler, Lead Pastor, The Village Church, President of the Acts 29 Church Planting Network

“Insightful, humbling, and worshipful, this book is a necessary call for the church to seek its power in the Spirit, not in the celebrity culture of a lost world. This book will encourage pastors and church members to look at themselves and their fellowships through the lens of the gospel.”

- Russell Moore, President, Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention

“You need this book. I need this book. We all need this book, probably a lot more than we imagine. Too many of these lessons I’ve learned the hard way. I can only pray a rising generation of Christian leaders will learn from Kyle and Jamin’s journey that the path to true glory passes through the way of the Lamb.”

- Collin Hansen, editorial director, The Gospel Coalition; author, *Blind Spots: Becoming a Courageous, Compassionate, Commissioned Church*

“*The Way of the Dragon or The Way of the Lamb* is possibly one of the most unique, yet profound books I’ve read in years. The wisdom packed into its pages is so remarkable, I felt like I was standing on holy ground with each page, needing to take off my shoes. What Jamin Goggin and Kyle Strobel have accomplished with this book is unparalleled - they’ve provided a well-lit path, paved by the elders and giants of our faith, to following the way of our redeemer, Jesus. What a monumental book. A must-read.”

- Nish Weiseth, author of *Speak: How Your Story Can Change the World*

“I was both encouraged and humbled by this book. The authors’ openness to the sages in the generation ahead of them is in shining contrast to the ‘generationalism’ that is so common today. But the combined weight of their analysis is a sobering reminder of the seductive toils of power in which we are all so easily entangled.”

- Os Guinness, author of *Impossible People*

“Absolutely brilliant! The Way of the Dragon or The Way of the Lamb is a countercultural roadmap for life in God's kingdom. The lust for power doesn't escape any of us, even those who are stewards of God's church. This book provides a gripping diagnosis, as well as a cure for those who desire it. Read this book!”

- Albert Tate, Pastor, Fellowship Monrovia

“Our culture – and our churches – often associate power and relevance with youth and self-exaltation. Fortunately, Jamin and Kyle have confronted this distortion, and many corruptions of power today. You're invited to join them, and discover afresh that as astounding as it may be, the way of the dragon is ultimately overcome by the way of the lamb.”

- Joshua Ryan Butler, author of *The Skeletons in God's Closet* and *The Pursuing God*, Pastor of Local & Global Outreach at Imago Dei Community (Portland, OR)

“Two young men in search of wisdom about the gifted leaders' most challenging seduction: power. Two young men in search of wisdom about the Bible's deepest paradigm for authentic leadership: the cross. These two young men have done it right: they've listened to some of the greats in the church today, some great leaders noted not by power but by humility and by a cruciform existence. *The Way of the Dragon or the Way of the Lamb* charts a path for today's young leaders -- the way of listening to the wisdom of the wise.”

- Scot McKnight, Julius R Mantey Professor of New Testament, Northern Seminary

“Goggin and Strobel effectively wrestle with the tension of power versus weakness by leaning on the Scriptures and the wisdom of fellow believers. Power is alluring for some and repulsive for others. Weakness is difficult, but in it the Lord works wonders. This book helps the Christian think rightly on these things.”

- Ed Stetzer, [www.edstetzer.com](http://www.edstetzer.com)

“A fresh perspective on the search for power. Jamin and Kyle explore the notion of power found in weakness, and what they discover—through personal experience, and in conversation with others—is that this is the power which sets us free. Lay down your wearying notions of what it means to embrace and pursue power, and accept the invitation here, to so much more.”

- Deidra Riggs, Author of *One: Unity in a Divided World*

“There are plenty of reasons to question what the modern church has become, and there are many critical voices eager to expose her failures. Goggin and Strobel are not among them. Like expert physicians, they dissect and diagnose the church's maladies. They consult with brilliant and wise experts, and show how the pathogen of worldly power enters the church and corrupts it. Like good doctors, however, Goggin and Strobel pursue their work with both precision and compassion, and their genuine love for the church is evident on every page. But what makes the book a must-read for every leader is the revelation that Goggin and Strobel aren't ultimately trying to heal the church, but themselves.”

- Skye Jethani, author of *WITH: Reimagine the Way You Relate to God*, and co-host of The Phil Vischer Podcast

“I have personally witnessed the destructive effects of leading the church in the Way of the Dragon. Kyle and Jamin have provided a humble and much needed prophetic exhortation,

both exposing their own brokenness, while drawing from the wisdom of godly leaders who have learned to lead in the Way of the Lamb. The church and her leaders desperately need to hear this message and heed its call to follow the Lamb so that we might humbly, gently and lovingly lead his bride.”

- Jeff Vanderstelt, *Visionary leader of Soma and Saturate, and the lead teaching pastor of Doxa Church, Bellevue, Washington. Author of Saturate and Gospel Fluency.*

“What if our idea of success is all wrong? What if the church has gloried the wrong things? For many pastors the overwhelming desire for success and celebrity is a constant temptation—leading to an obsession with numbers and notoriety. In *The Way of the Dragon or the Way of the Lamb*, Jamin Goggin and Kyle Strobel, embark on a pilgrimage to show us a different way, spending time with men and women who have eschewed the way of the dragon for a life marked by kingdom depth, lasting influence and the wisdom of weakness. Sharing the lives and wisdom of their mentors, this book is a tonic for the 21st century church, showing Christians that the wisdom of the cross is the path to lasting meaning, deep joy in the midst of suffering and powerful influence—in short, the recipe for renewal, both personal and corporate. I hope this book is read widely.”

- Jim Belcher, Author of *In Search of Deep Faith*

“What happens when Christians embody a worldly approach to power and try to use that to advance Christ’s kingdom? This is the question that drove Strobel and Goggin on their quest to gain wisdom about a Christ-shaped understanding of power. Along the way, we are allowed to eavesdrop on their conversations with remarkable men and women who not only understand where power comes from, what it is for, and how it should be expressed, but whose lives have faithfully embodied the Way of the Lamb. As skilled curators, Strobel and Goggin provide profound reflections that draw out the beauty and wisdom of these sages. The result is a trail of gems, glistening in the night, leading Christians today to recover an ancient and forgotten path.”

- Glenn Packiam, Author *Discover the Mystery of Faith*

“American Evangelicalism needs Jesus. These pages testify to the reality that an exodus from celebrity to humility, certainty to maturity, toxic leadership to simple discipleship, successfulness to faithfulness, isn’t through the way of self-righteous rants, power plays or smug condemnation. Instead, this is the confession of two brothers seeking the way of the Lamb by surrendering to the wisdom of elders. Leaders whose lives look like Christ. When these elders are listened to, a culture that proclaims “Jesus is the Way” will join them in “The Way of Jesus”.”

- Jarrod McKenna, Teaching Pastor at Westcity Church and Co-founder of First Home Project (Perth, Australia)

## Acknowledgments

This book was such a joy to write. I am amazed at how captivating the Harry Potter stories are, and it has been so fun to engage the themes from the stories with other Christians. In particular, Faith Gatlin and Janet Lee were incredibly helpful in the editing process of the book, and Tasha Austin provided some helpful thoughts in the early stages as well. All of your insights and edits made this a much better read. Sara Brown and Jenn Smith provided much encouragement along the way because of their never-ceasing willingness to discuss anything Harry Potter. Tim Pickavance's always helpful conversations were helpful fodder in my thinking, and for that I am grateful. More than anyone else though, my wife Kelli has shared my love of Harry Potter from the beginning. She is the first person to push me to read the books, and reading them together was a joy. Thank you all for your help!

## Author Information

Kyle Strobel is the co-author of *The Way of the Dragon or the Way of the Lamb: Searching for Jesus' Path of Power in a Church that has Abandoned It* (Thomas Nelson), *Beloved Dust: Drawing Close to God by Discovering the Truth About Yourself* (Thomas Nelson) and is the author of *Formed for the Glory of God: Learning from the Spiritual Practices of Jonathan Edwards* (IVP). Kyle is currently a professor of spiritual theology and formation at Talbot School of Theology, Biola University, and speaks broadly on spiritual formation, theology and the life of the church. To learn more about Kyle and his ministry, you can go to [www.KyleStrobel.com](http://www.KyleStrobel.com)

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## Endnotes

<sup>i</sup> While Harry may not have technically “died” when he was hit with the killing curse in the woods, he underwent a kind of death and resurrection experience. If nothing else, this is typologically linked to the biblical narrative.

<sup>ii</sup> J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (New York: Arthur A. Levine Books, 2007), 739 (hereafter, this volume will be listed as “7” followed by a colon and the page number (e.g., 7:738-739)).

<sup>iii</sup> The easiest place to find a translation of *The Didache* is probably:  
<http://www.thedidache.com>

<sup>iv</sup> See Dumbledore’s letter to Grindelwald: 7:357.

<sup>v</sup> For Dumbledore’s explanation of what happened in his past, see 7:715-717.

<sup>vi</sup> The notion that “hate begets hate” is a strong strand of Martin Luther King, Jr.’s thought. See Jamin Goggin and Kyle Strobel, *The Way of the Dragon or the Way of the Lamb: Searching for Jesus’ Path of Power in a Church that has Abandoned It* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2017).

<sup>vii</sup> Dumbledore tells Harry, “the fact that you can feel pain like this is your greatest strength,” to which Harry replies in anger. Dumbledore continues, “Harry, suffering like this proves you are still a man! This pain is part of being human.” J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (New York: Arthur A. Levine Books, 2003), 823-824 (hereafter, this volume will be listed as “5” followed by a colon and the page number).

<sup>viii</sup> I was always frustrated with the end of Job, which struck me as incredibly superficial, until I was introduced to this insight by Ellen Davis in her delightful volume, *Getting Involved With God: Rediscovering the Old Testament* (Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publishing, 2001), 121-146.

<sup>ix</sup> One can read “The Tale of the Three Brothers” in book 7 (7:406-409), but it is better to read it in its proper environment, in J. K. Rowling’s, *The Tales of Beedle the Bard* translated by Hermione Granger with commentary by Albus Dumbledore (New York, Arthur A. Levine Books, 2008), 87-105. The advantage of this volume, beyond the wonderful translation from the ancient runes by Hermione Granger, is Dumbledore’s personal notes on the work. Dumbledore is characteristically insightful here.

<sup>x</sup> 7:409

<sup>xi</sup> 7:409-410

<sup>xii</sup> 7:391

<sup>xiii</sup> 7:126

<sup>xiv</sup> 7:134

<sup>xv</sup> See 7:738

<sup>xvi</sup> 7:691

<sup>xvii</sup> 7:698

<sup>xviii</sup> Harry’s wand, therefore, also experienced the life of a Phoenix – through death to resurrection. This is fitting since the core of Harry’s wand was from a Phoenix, but not just any Phoenix, it was one of Fawkes’ tail-feathers. J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (New York, Arthur A. Levine Books, 2000), 697 (hereafter, this volume will be listed as “4” followed by a colon and the page number).

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<sup>xix</sup> Harry first encounters the Mirror of Erised in book 1. J. K. Rowling *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (Arthur A. Levine Books, 1997), 207-209 (hereafter, this volume will be listed as “1” followed by a colon and the page number).

<sup>xx</sup> 7:680, 713

<sup>xxi</sup> It is also telling, that when Harry, Ron, and Hermione hear about the Deathly Hallows Harry wants the Resurrection Stone, Ron the Elder Wand, and Hermione the Cloak of Invisibility. Death unveils the longings and fears in each of us, and each responds accordingly.

<sup>xxii</sup> 7:720

<sup>xxiii</sup> See 7:733-734.

<sup>xxiv</sup> J. K. Rowling's, *The Tales of Beedle the Bard* translated by Hermione Granger with commentary by Albus Dumbledore (New York, Arthur A. Levine Books, 2008). This work includes five children's stories that are famous in the wizarding world, “The Wizard and the Hopping Pot,” “The Fountain of Fair Fortune,” “The Warlock's Hairy Heart,” Babbitty Rabbitty and Her Cackling Stump,” and “The Tale of the Three Brothers.”

<sup>xxv</sup> <https://mercorthodoxy.com/demands-love-harry-potter/> accessed August 2, 2016.

<sup>xxvi</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xxvii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xxviii</sup> 5:204

<sup>xxix</sup> For the whole song, see 5:204-207.

<sup>xxx</sup> 5:112

<sup>xxxi</sup> 5:127

<sup>xxxii</sup> 5:832

<sup>xxxiii</sup> 7:225

<sup>xxxiv</sup> I appreciate the insights on this from my friend Tim Pickavance, and, in particular, his thoughts on why romantic love seems to be subdued in the narrative.

<sup>xxxv</sup> Again, my friend Tim Pickavance first turned me on to this insight. For full disclosure, it should be noted that Tim (who is a redhead), myself, and Jamie were all inseparable for a while at school. Furthermore, Tim and Jamie married, and I went on to marry a redhead. Ergo, he is the Ron to my Harry.

<sup>xxxvi</sup> Seneca, *Letters From A Stoic*, trans. Robin Campbell (New York: Penguin Books, 1969), 50.

<sup>xxxvii</sup> 7:706 – It is interesting in this scene that Harry is naked and unashamed, like Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, until he sees Voldemort's defiled body. Harry wishes he were clothed here because it makes him feel unclean, a constant theme with Harry in relation to Voldemort (see 5:492ff.).

<sup>xxxviii</sup> 1:290

<sup>xxxix</sup> 1:291

<sup>xl</sup> 1:298

<sup>xli</sup> 4:648-649

<sup>xlii</sup> 4:15

<sup>xliii</sup> Rowling, *Tales of Beedle the Bard*, 59.

<sup>xliv</sup> J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* (New York, Arthur A. Levine Books, 2005), 443 (hereafter, this volume will be listed as “6” followed by a colon and the page number).

<sup>xlv</sup> 6:444

<sup>xlvi</sup> 6:444

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<sup>xlvii</sup> “The Warlock’s Hairy Heart,” begins with this: “There was once a handsome, rich and talented young warlock, who observed that his friends grew foolish when they fell in love, gamboling and preening, losing their appetites and their dignity. The young warlock resolved never to fall prey to such weakness, and employed Dark Arts to ensure his immunity.” Rowling, *The Tales of Beedle the Bard*, 45. It is interesting that the young warlock sees love as weakness. This is a tell-tale sign of those lost in the way of power.

<sup>xlviii</sup> 4:653

<sup>xliv</sup> “The Ethics of Elfland,” is a wonderful chapter in G. K. Chesterton’s classic *Orthodoxy* (Catholic Way Publishing, 2013), 45-68, and for the specific quote, 62.

<sup>l</sup> J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secretes* (Arthur A. Levine Books, 1998), 317 (hereafter, this volume will be listed as “2” followed by a colon and the page number).

<sup>li</sup> Rowling, *The Tales of Beedle the Bard*, 59

<sup>lii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>liii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>liv</sup> For a representative sampling: 4:640, 643; 6:444, 449, 502.

<sup>lv</sup> 6:509

<sup>lvi</sup> 7:684-685

<sup>lvii</sup> 7:685

<sup>lviii</sup> For instance, 5:810; 7:593.

<sup>lix</sup> 5:810

<sup>lx</sup> 5:838

<sup>lxi</sup> 5:823-824

<sup>lxii</sup> 5:843-844

<sup>lxiii</sup> 7:709

<sup>lxiv</sup> 7:738-739

<sup>lxv</sup> 4:526

<sup>lxvi</sup> See 4:526-527, 603.

<sup>lxvii</sup> 4:690

<sup>lxviii</sup> 5:746

<sup>lxix</sup> Like all government agencies, the ministry thinks that it should speak into education, and when it does (like in our world), no one becomes educated.

<sup>lxx</sup> 6:74

<sup>lxxi</sup> 6:74-75

<sup>lxxii</sup> 6:70-71

<sup>lxxiii</sup> 4:534

<sup>lxxiv</sup> 7:636-637

<sup>lxxv</sup> I do not recall who first pointed this out to me, but I’ve found it to be a helpful insight into Dostoevsky’s imagery.

<sup>lxxvi</sup> For Lockhart, see *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secretes*.

<sup>lxxvii</sup> Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *The Prose Works of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow* Vol. 3 (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1866), 361-362.

<sup>lxxviii</sup> 5:534, 590, 650

<sup>lxxix</sup> 7:683

<sup>lxxx</sup> 7:683

<sup>lxxxii</sup> 7:758

<sup>lxxxiii</sup> 7:745

<sup>lxxxiiii</sup> 7:745-746

<sup>lxxxv</sup> 7:732