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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Arthur, Sarah.

Walking with Frodo : a devotional journey through The lord of the rings / Sarah Arthur.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 0-8423-8554-1

1. Tolkien, J. R. R. (John Ronald Reuel), date. Lord of the rings.
2. Christianity and literature—England—History—20th century.
3. Middle Earth (Imaginary place)—Religious aspects—Christianity.
4. Tolkien, J. R. R. (John Ronald Reuel), date—Religion.
5. Fantasy fiction, English—Religious aspects—Christianity.
6. Middle Earth (Imaginary place)—Devotional literature.
7. Fantasy fiction, English—Devotional literature.

I. Title.

PR6039.O32 L6323 2003

823'.912—dc21

2003013922

Printed in the United States of America

08 07 06 05 04

11 10 9 8 7 6 5



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how to use this BOOK

This book is intended to be a devotional guide. That means there are short readings based on themes in *The Lord of the Rings*, followed by related Bible passages and “Going Further” questions for reflection. You will want to (a) be familiar with the movies or the books, (b) have a Bible handy, and (c) grab a pen or pencil. Keep in mind there will be times when the devotions refer to things that happened in the books and times when they refer to things that happened in the movies, but generally speaking the references are to both. For those who

have never read the books, the “Quick Reference Guide” in the back can help you keep track of who is who and what is what in *Walking with Frodo*.

The eighteen devotions in this book are actually nine pairs (nine being a rather *LOTR*-friendly number, don't you think?). Each pair explores two different ways to react in a given situation, e.g., Will you choose deceit or honesty? The first devotion in the pair examines our tendency to serve ourselves; the second looks at our call to serve God and others. Each ends with a challenge: How will you make this truth practical in your daily life?

In other words, what are you going to do about it?

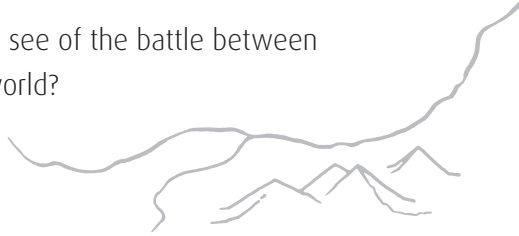


GOING FURTHER:

What's your favorite part of *The Lord of the Rings*?

What makes it *the good stuff*?

What evidence do you see of the battle between good and evil in our world?





WEEK
ONE

CHOOSING
DARKNESS
or
LIGHT



Part One:

CHOOSING DARKNESS

*The Balrog made no answer. The fire in it seemed to die,
but the darkness grew.*

—FROM *THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING*, BOOK TWO, CHAPTER FIVE

Think back to the opening night of *The Two
Towers*.

Your *LOTR*-junkie friends have just stood in line for six hours to buy tickets. They now hand you a ticket in exchange for several buckets of movie popcorn (it occurs to you later that they had the better deal), predicting in low tones that madness will erupt the instant the theater opens. But this is something you have anticipated and trained for together. Your plan:

Step #1: Lock arms.

Step #2: Mosh. If that fails:

Step #3: Bodysurf to the eighth row (middle seat) and hold fast till the others arrive.

The training pays off. You storm the doors and seize the eighth row, popcorn miraculously intact. After arm-wrestling a couple of junior high kids into submission, you and your friends get comfortably seated. The movie won't start for another hour, but what's one hour? You've been waiting a whole year.

Just when you've decided that you desperately need to go to the bathroom, the lights dim and the action begins. You've talked about this for months, but nothing in your wildest dreams has prepared you for the stomach-lurching shot over the mountains into the Mines of Moria; and nothing has prepared you for Gandalf's epic struggle with the Balrog, falling headfirst down the abyss.

How on earth did those CGI³ guys *do it*?

But most importantly, how does *Gandalf* do it?

In the previous flick, Gandalf stands on the bridge looking small and frail against the looming giant of a whip-cracking Balrog. You can hardly believe that Gandalf will survive the fall into the abyss, let alone everything that happens afterwards. But you have read the books (after all, you and your friends are *LOTR* junkies). And you know the nightmare has only just begun.

The Balrog is portrayed in the movie as a creature of fire and flame. Tolkien also presents it as a creature of darkness—one of many—and not the darkest of the dark, either (don't forget Shelob). In *The Fellowship of the Ring* Tolkien writes,

What it was could not be seen: it was like a great shadow, in the middle of which was a dark form, of man-shape maybe, yet greater; and a power and terror seemed to be in it and to go before it.⁴

The idea that darkness would present itself as a *being*—with not only a visible form but also an intellect and will—is terrifying. When this being first appears in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, there is instant panic among the members of the Fellowship. It's like they've suddenly been struck blind with fear, confusion, and despair. Such an encounter is more than any of them bargained for in this journey they agreed to take with Frodo, a kind of nightmare that surpasses anything Frodo himself could have imagined before leaving the front door

of Bag End. Aragorn and Boromir beg to fight the creature, but Gandalf says, “Fly! This is a foe beyond any of you.”⁵ In the end, only Gandalf stands fast, and it costs him everything.

So here’s the point.

There *is* such a being, though he may not have a visible form like what Tolkien or the *LOTR* movie gurus created. (In fact, C. S. Lewis, author of *The Screwtape Letters*, pictured him dressed in a business suit.) And the analogy is far from perfect.

But he’s real.

At the heart of the spiritual opposition to the Creator God of the universe is a character who goes by many names: Satan, Beelzebub, the devil, the enemy, the evil one. Satan was once an angel who rebelled against God. He fled from the light of God’s presence to establish his own throne in darkness, taking a host of rebellious angels with him (Jude 1:6). Jesus said of him, “I saw Satan fall like light-

ning from heaven” (Luke 10:18). Satan has been waging war with God and all who belong to him ever since.

Whatever the murky history of his past, Satan is real. He specializes in absorbing light, in casting shadows, and in generating great vacuums of fear and spiritual blindness. He is especially good at blocking the way of those who have sworn allegiance to Jesus Christ and at stopping them from accomplishing whatever tasks God has given them to do (1 Peter 5:8-9). He has also mastered the art of convincing people that he doesn’t exist, that there’s no such thing as darkness (Isaiah 5:20). And he takes particular delight in enslaving people to the darkness before they have a chance to love the Light, by teaching them to hate the Light itself (John 3:19-20).

This is the lesson of the Balrog from deep within the heart of Moria:



So what are you going to do about it?

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

EPHESIANS 6:12

THE WORD ON DARKNESS

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

Isaiah 5:20; John 3:19-20; 1 Peter 5:8-9



GOING FURTHER:

What evidence do you see of the power of darkness at work in your world?

Who among your friends or family is ignoring this reality?

Who has given in to paralysis, despair, or exhaustion in the face of darkness?

Who actually likes the darkness and hates the Light?

What about you: What is your response to the darkness?

What are you going to do about it?

