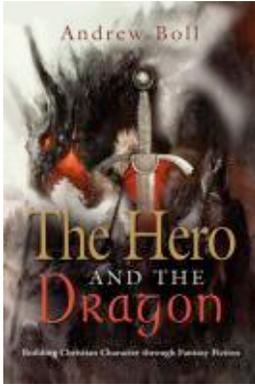


Andrew Boll

The Hero
AND THE
Dragon

Building Christian Character through Fantasy Fiction



The Hero and the Dragon is a must read for anyone who enjoys reading fantasy fiction, or struggles with deciding if it is right for them or their children. This book explores many of the common elements in the fantasy genre, examining how they can be used to teach spiritual truths - and how they can be abused to lead young people into spiritual darkness.

The Hero and the Dragon

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THE HERO AND THE DRAGON:

**BUILDING CHRISTIAN CHARACTER
THROUGH FANTASY FICTION**

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Chapter II

Magic, The Blathering: How to Tell Which Craft from Witch

“Magic” is undoubtedly the single biggest obstacle between Christian readers and good fantasy fiction. If magic is an element in the story, many Christians will immediately recoil, withdraw a silver cross on a chain from around their neck, douse themselves in holy water and look for the nearest “Torch and Pitchfork Superstore.”

But that’s *witchcraft*, right?! Some of the time, yes; and in those cases I wholeheartedly condone nearly all of the aforementioned reactions. But most often, any “magic” appearing in fiction is little more than an effective literary device and is far less dangerous to a reader’s spiritual well-being than a *vast* majority of “non-fiction” you’ll find in bookstores or libraries. In fact, it can often be a valuable tool for teaching Christian values.

In this chapter, we’ll discuss how “magic” is often used in stories in a way that poses very little spiritual danger; oftentimes by authors who are openly Christian to intentionally teach moral and spiritual truths. We will also discuss “magic” that reflects the very real and powerful forces behind *witchcraft* that are at work in our world today. To help readers understand the difference and equip them to better recognize “bad magic” in books, we will briefly explore some of the belief

systems in the world today that incorporate witchcraft into their ideologies. Finally, we will look at how some Christians unconsciously hold attitudes and ideas about God that actually reflect the influences of pagan religions - a phenomenon which demonstrates that fantasy fiction is rarely to blame for our misinterpretations of God and His will for us.

"Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world."

~1 John 4:1

Doesn't "magic" blur the lines between reality and fantasy?

In most cases, that assertion is absolutely preposterous. "Magic" is the most obvious element *separating* the real world from the fantasy world in the minds of readers! In fact, that's the very reason that many authors choose to use magic in the first place. As soon as readers see the elderly fellow with long white beard levitate across the river or shoot a fireball from his fingertips, they say, "Okay, this isn't *real*. That sort of thing doesn't happen in real life."

Fantasy is meant to *reflect* life, not be a literal rendering. It is an effective way to help people understand important concepts.

When Jesus would teach His disciples, He'd say, "Listen up: The kingdom of heaven is *like* this..." and then go on to tell a completely fictional story. He knew that a story doesn't have to be "true" in order to be "truth." In fact, fiction (even fantasy) can be the most effective means to convey a message about life, faith, or a difficult concept. We constantly draw comparisons between things that don't seem similar in any way on the outside, because we know that there's an effective connection underneath. If someone isn't familiar with an idea, we compare it to something they already know.

Here's an example: Fantasy fiction is like a paintball training exercise meant to help new soldiers understand the dynamics of combat. The cadets *could* say to themselves, "This has nothing to do with the reality of war. The ballistics are completely different from live ammunition, the weight of the gun is significantly less, and the bodily damage sustained from the impact of the projectile is minimal. In *real* combat, I'd be dead from getting shot like that. Besides, we're leaving out important factors like the trauma of witnessing actual bloodshed and the fear of pain and death, both of which make a major difference in a critical combat situation. I really don't see how this is going to prepare me for active duty, and I'm going to abstain from these exercises so that I don't become *confused* about what's real and what isn't."

Of course the soldiers in this exercise know that the conflict isn't "real." It is vitally important that they understand the difference between a training exercise and lethal combat,

because the goals are entirely different. The differences are there for the safety and survival of the cadets, who are trying to learn about combat in a safe and effective manner.

When the real bullets start flying, how likely is it that the soldiers will get confused and think, “Oh, they’re only paintballs”? No, they will be thankful that they had the opportunity to prepare for the experience in a hazard-free training exercise. They will know how to maneuver safely, how to communicate with their team, and how to operate their equipment; things that haven’t changed from the training exercise.

Just the same, magic serves a purpose to distinguish the fantasy world as a “training grounds” where the rules are different but the same valuable lessons can be learned. While readers are obviously not expecting to meet wizards throwing fireballs at them or being afflicted by a cursed ring, they know that many challenges await them in real life. The same courage that helped the hero in the story defeat the evil wizard will help the reader stand up for his faith in a school that doesn’t foster a spiritually friendly environment. The same fortitude and patience that helped the

“Literature adds to reality, it does not simply describe it. It enriches the necessary competencies that daily life requires and provides; and in this respect, it irrigates the deserts that our lives have already become.”

~C.S. Lewis

hero withstand the temptation and suffering that the cursed ring caused him will help the reader to withstand temptation or despair in his own trials. Although the situations and circumstances in the stories we read are often far-fetched, the outcome remains that we integrate the lessons, values, and character exhibited in the fantasy world into our own lives.

Magic should establish clear boundaries

Magic can serve many purposes in fantasy fiction. It may help the reader to connect with the story better by absorbing them into a world of rich wonder and beauty. It may serve as an analogy for real-life power, such as authority, charisma, or wealth. Or it may simply help to advance the plot sometimes. Whatever the case, for magic to stay on the “safe” side in fantasy fiction, it needs to fall clearly in the realm of *fiction*.

Since magic defines the fictional world more clearly, it would defeat the purpose to write a story that is *supposed* to be set in a fantasy world and uses rituals, rites, or other forms of real world witchcraft as its form of “magic.” That isn’t to say that this never happens; it does, and frequently. That is why it is so important to be able to identify and avoid literature that promotes the use of pagan demonic powers.

Magic is generally handled best in fantasy fiction when it isn’t *explained* in great detail. If wizards are able to do magic simply because they are born with the ability, fine. Here in the real world, that isn’t going to send me on a mad quest in search

of forbidden knowledge. If an object has magical powers just because that's part of its nature, very good. This use isn't going to encourage anyone to look up rituals for enchanting ordinary items. The conditions under which magical powers take effect are so vague that they are clearly only there for literary purposes, and anyone who is enticed into witchcraft because of reading about this was obviously predisposed to the notion anyhow.

Authors like J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis were founding fathers of modern fantasy fiction, and they handled the concept of magic beautifully. For them, magic was simply a part of the fictional world in which their stories took place. Because they invented worlds that were completely separate from ours, the laws and dynamics that governed those worlds were different. The way magic worked was similar to the manner that gravity, velocity, or electricity abide by certain natural laws in our universe. It was clearly *not* the real world, but only a "parallel" of it. The fact that elves, wizards, or other characters have magical abilities was no more out of place than the fact that in our world, fish can breathe underwater and we cannot.

Yet writers are notoriously striving for fresh, vivid details in their stories, and sometimes they look to their theory or system of magic as a place to provide this. Magic *can* be explained in detail safely. For instance, a story might have a magic broomstick that allows someone to fly on it every fourth Tuesday of the month as long as their shoes are on the wrong feet and they are wearing a necktie instead of a belt. Aren't

those fun, fresh details? But they don't try to explain away the *origin* of the magic; where it came from or what makes it work. The story might even try to do that, by saying that an old woman used it to smack a wolf on the nose during a full moon after sweeping up spilled garlic. We're still leaving out the source of magical power, and that's just as well. While this back-story is drenched in bits and pieces of pagan folklore, most people would agree that these notions are so cliché and timeworn that their acceptance into pop culture has rendered them fairly harmless.

This is generally the reason why "fairy tales" aren't considered terribly hazardous by most people. The extravagant characters and outlandish events help place the story *clearly* in the realm of fantasy, safely removed from any real-world connections other than the moral of the story. "Magic" is just how things happen in that type of story, and what makes the weird, fun, unpredictable occurrences possible.

From whence cometh such strange powers?

Unfortunately, the good old method of letting magic stand for itself in a story and do its job silently is becoming scarce. With the advent of "fan-fiction," web-based fan clubs, "wiki-pages," and the like, the trend these days is to explain everything to death. There is always someone who insists on knowing *precisely how* a thing works, whether it's a lightsaber

or a magical lightning bolt. This is where magic can get into dangerous territory.

In reality, there are only two sources of supernatural power in our world; that which comes from God, and everything else which comes from Satan. We see both forms of power manifested frequently in the Bible. Exhibitions of Satanic power abound in Scripture, from Pharaoh's magicians in the book of Exodus, to the witch of Endor in I Samuel, to Simon the magician in the book of Acts. These all show us that witchcraft is a reality in our world; any supernatural powers obtained apart from God are solely from the Devil and will serve only his purposes.

Conversely, we see far more numerous and more potent exhibitions of power on the part of God Himself in the Bible. Miracles, signs, and wonders show the direct intervention of the Almighty throughout His story of the salvation of mankind. Prophets communicate God's will to His people and reveal His promises to them through the foretelling of the future. God demonstrates His omnipotence through creation itself, calling into being planets, stars, and living things out of nothing. And of course, Jesus demonstrates the greatest power in the universe in the climactic cosmic struggle for the fate of the world; He breaks the normal spiritual laws by taking

*"Miracles are not
contrary to nature,
but only contrary
to what we know
about nature."*

~St. Augustine

our sins upon Himself, dying, and then rising again in power and victory over death itself.

These signs, powers, and wonders – both from God and from Satan – *could* be taken by some in our world for “magic.” If this is the case, then these powers are either divinely given through the Holy Spirit, or they are obtained from the Devil and his demons through rebellion to God. Those are the only two sources of power available for supernatural or “magical” powers.

So, does the magic in fantasy fiction come from God or from the Devil? Take the wizard, for instance, who is acting as the “wise and helpful guide” for our young hero in a certain story. He uses his magic to fight evil, to heal, to assist the fledgling hero on his journey, and to help save the world. This power couldn’t possibly come from the Devil; after all, “How can Satan cast out Satan?” And yet, I wouldn’t go so far as to say that all good wizards in fantasy have been given authority from God to perform miraculous feats how and when they see fit.

The original question lays down a false premise. In *our* world, all “magic” or power must originate, at the source, with either God or the enemy. But remember, in the fantasy world, “magic” is not necessarily “witchcraft” as we know it, because magic is part and parcel to the world in which the characters live.

If a story were written about a land that doesn’t exist in real life where all the people had six eyes and two mouths, we

would simply accept this as the premise for the “story-world” and move on. There would be no question about the “morality” of the extra facial features, because that’s just the way things are in this story. Or if a story were written where some people can change their skin color at will, and others are able to burrow through the ground like moles, and still others utilize echo-location to navigate dark places, no one would condemn any of these things as “witchcraft” or find them morally reprehensible.

But really, how different are these strange abilities from the magic users of typical fantasy stories? Is it because the magic in fantasy fiction is too much like “witchcraft” in real life? There are many pagan spells, charms, and rituals, but I don’t know of many belief systems in this world where practitioners go around blasting things with lightning bolts and fireballs – a practice that seems to be common among wizards in fantasy fiction. I doubt that many dark cults market themselves by convincing young people that they can teach them to teleport across the country, or summon a warhorse out of thin air, or lift boulders by pointing at them. No, our common sense tells us that those things are elements strictly belonging to the fantasy world, and while they’re fun to pretend and dream about, they aren’t a part of reality.

Jesus once spoke of the dangers of trying to fit together two completely separate ways of thinking. He said, “No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch will pull away from the garment, making the tear worse. Neither do

men pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst, the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined” (Matt. 9:16-17).

When people try to apply “real life” explanations to the magical fabric of fantasy worlds, the patch never holds. They are two completely separate things, or at least they should be (the next section deals with the dangers created when they *aren't*). We can't expect to be able to apply the rules of our world – in which magic could only be power given from above or below – to a fantasy world created as a parallel to our own with its own physical laws and mechanics. The wineskin bursts; anything good that we could have obtained from the story is lost and our own understanding is sullied by the attempt.

True witchcraft in fantasy fiction

By now, I've either convinced you that most magic in fantasy stories is no more than a fairly harmless literary device, or you've decided that I'm a quack and quit reading four paragraphs ago. Now I'll risk undermining my argument so far by cautioning readers that there are *also* many fantasy stories which describe “magic” in terms of actual pagan witchcraft, brought over straight from our world.

Some authors feel that in order to lend their story an air of “authenticity,” they ought to make their magic more “realistic.” This is where we get into trouble with young people having difficulty maintaining the boundary between fantasy and reality. “Magic” in these stories is often based upon Wicca, Shamanism, eastern mysticism, and other occult or pagan beliefs and practices. The “spells” are often found in ancient grimoires and described in some detail to help “immerse” the reader in the atmosphere of the story.

“To deny the possibility, nay, the actual existence of witchcraft and sorcery, is at once flatly to contradict the revealed Word of God...every nation in the world hath, in its turn, borne testimony, by either example we attested or by prohibitory laws, which at least suppose the possibility of a commerce with evil spirits.”

~Sir William Blackstone

Young readers find this sort of thing fascinating, and they revel in the feeling that they have access to some sort of “secret forbidden knowledge.” Teenagers crave attention; the need to feel “special” or “unique” in some way – any way – is a powerful motivating factor in the choices that they make. What kid wouldn’t want to have hidden powers, to be able to finally have a sense of *control* over the world around them? Who wouldn’t want to be able to impress the others with a display of mysterious force? And the result can sometimes be that

young people are slowly drawn into occultism because of their yearning for respect, power, or excitement.

It seems harmless at first; they don't see how it's hurting anyone and they're still going to church – maybe just reading non-fiction books about “magicks” or looking things up on the internet. A few experiments here and there, just for fun. But it's an opening, and all the Serpent has to do is get his head in and the whole body will easily follow after. Faith can be quickly eroded and shattered when a person walks willingly into the houses of darkness.

Consider how magic is being used in the stories you read or in the movies and television shows that you watch. There is a great deal of difference between the fantastic structure of magic in C.S. Lewis's land of Narnia and, say, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, which is set in the “real world” and prominently features Wiccan practices. The easier it is to believe that “this is real” or “this is possible” (which it *is*), the greater the threat that a person's beliefs will be influenced by what they are reading or watching. There is a profound difference between an exquisitely crafted fantasy realm that seems to “come to life” and the dark reality of satanic powers that are featured in many books, movies, and games today. The fact that these depictions of sincere witchcraft are labeled “fantasy” is a deception in and of itself.

Animism

Probably the greatest influence at this time on the systems of magic being used in fantasy fiction is “animism.” Animism is the belief that *all* things in the universe – rocks, trees, people, stars, etc. – contain some kind of spirit or spiritual energy. It is a primary “theology” of many New Age religions, but the idea is nothing new in itself. Shintoism, paganism, Wicca, many tribal religions, and even some forms of Buddhism and Hinduism embrace this philosophy.

Many fantasy fiction authors use this concept in their writings because it serves as an explanation for “magic.” They assert that it is the “spiritual energy” found in all things – living or not – that provides the force or power behind magic. While serving a convenient purpose in their fiction, they are also connecting readers with a philosophy that enjoys growing popularity in our culture, much to the chagrin of the Church and Christian parents.

What’s so dangerous about this idea? Lots of things. First of all, the basic premise is that “God” is not a single entity, and certainly not the Triune God that Christians worship. “God” is everything; the trees, rocks, stars, and most importantly, *you*. This is an idea that definitely appeals to our egocentric, self-serving culture today. Eventually, the conclusion must be that I *am* God and can therefore do whatever I want without regard to others or any form of deity. I have raised myself to the highest level of existence (something we are naturally inclined to do anyway), and thus have fallen into the oldest and most

primal temptation; to rebel against God and replace Him with *myself*.

This philosophy also lends itself to confusing the “creation” with the “Creator.” We obviously need to be responsible with nature and care for the world that God has given us, but we aren’t to *worship* created things. We are already bombarded with messages telling us to put “things” before God, and we certainly don’t need another excuse to do so; especially one that “moralizes” such an action and endows people with a warped sense of piety for succumbing to this temptation.

Another main tenet and natural result of animism is the belief in some kind of “reincarnation.” When a thing dies or is destroyed, animism says that its “life force” or “spirit energy” goes out of it, typically into some kind of cosmic pool of energy. As new “things” come into being, spirit energy is drawn from that “pool” and placed into the newly “born” object or creature.

Nearly all philosophies and religions based on animism weave a theology of “good works” into their beliefs. If you are a “good” person and don’t commit evil during your life, then your lot will be somewhat better in the next life. It gives the individual a sense of control in an otherwise chaotic and

*“Some have been
to the mountain.
I have been to my
knees by the side
of my bed.”*

~Robert Brault

unpredictable world, and it provides a measure of control over society in general (if enough people believe this idea).

Animism and the ideas that flow from it conflict with much of what we know to be true from the Bible. God created all things, and then breathed life into man and woman, giving them alone out of all creation *pneumos*, or “spirit.” It is only God who “animates” us and gives us both physical and spiritual life. At our death, we know that we will stand before Him for final judgment, and we know that we will be clothed in the righteousness that is ours through Christ; a gift of God and not a product of our own works. It is only this knowledge and the life-giving faith through the Holy Spirit that empowers and “animates” us to serve God and our neighbors out of thankfulness, having been changed and made alive in Christ through His Word.

*“I am the way,
the truth, and the
life. No one
comes to the
Father except
through me.”*

~John 14:6

Animism and its effects can be seen throughout our society and have found their way into mainstream culture, right down to cartoon movies aimed at children. While I admire the *Star Wars* saga for their great portrayal of “The Hero’s Journey,” I am somewhat wary of their use of animism theology in their explanation of “The Force.” Like with so many other factors, one needs to be cautious and discerning when identifying

spiritual threats in movies and literature and carefully weigh the positive aspects with the dangers involved.

Shamanism

Another “contribution” to dangerous portrayals of magic in fantasy fiction is the incorporation of traditional shamanism as a means of magical power. “Shamanism” is the idea that an individual must serve as the “connection” between the “spirit world” and our own world, and that spirits and mystical powers are channeled through this person (the “shaman”). Priests in many tribal religions act in this role, and it has its roots in the traditional belief systems of Native Americans, Africa, Southeast Asia, and even some local pagan religions in parts of Europe. In fact, even the ancient Greeks used the “shaman” concept for those who served as priests and oracles.

*“For there is one
God and one
mediator between
God and men, the
man Christ Jesus,
who gave himself
as a ransom for all
men – the
testimony given in
its proper time.”*

~1 Timothy 2:5-6

Apart from the obvious spiritual dangers associated with this belief (see Chapter I part 6: “Danger!”), Christians need to be aware of some of the subtle influences shamanism can have on our own faith. Shamanism places an emphasis on “ritual,”

something that appeals psychologically to humans, giving them a sense of control, security, and familiarity. It expresses a belief in the power of charms, trinkets, or other objects that hold “mystical” powers; a concept that the Church has tried to combat for centuries. It also places faith in human beings and their ability to interact with, coerce, and communicate with “God” or the “spirit world,” rather than placing faith and trust in God and relying on His Word for guidance and revelation.

Occultism

The “occult” is a broad term that generally describes most belief systems that in some way counter Christian theology. More precisely, it refers to practices such as Wicca, Satanism, paganism, astrology, divination, alchemy, or any other belief system that purportedly relies on “secret” or “hidden” knowledge for supernatural or paranormal powers.

The individual methods and practices of each of these “religions” are too varied and numerous to detail in this book, so I won’t. But what binds these groups together is the common practice of seeking knowledge, power, or advancement by means that have been forbidden by Scripture. God wants His children to rely on *Him* for guidance, protection, and wisdom. However, our lack of faith and sinful tendency to rebel often causes people to turn to created things for insight (the stars, magic bones, chicken entrails, etc.), or to

seek knowledge from (evil) spirits. Again, refer to Chapter I part 6: "Danger!" for more explanation on this point.

Unfortunately, believers and proponents of the occult tend to be naturally drawn toward writing fantasy fiction because of their "esoteric" interests; much more so than most Christian writers. So readers do need to be on the lookout for occult references and influences in the stories they are reading. It is difficult for writers who belong to occult groups to avoid promoting their beliefs and "educating" their readers about their theological ideas and practices in the stories they write. It is the responsibility of the reader to understand *what* they are reading, know which authors have a reputation as dangerous pundits of the occult, and to be prepared and equipped to combat these influences in their own heart and in the world around them.

Danger!

Ah, fairy tales...

Every child clearly knows when something belongs in the realm of fantasy because of the outlandish occurrences and freakish phenomenon. I mean, come on; talking animals? Ghostly visitations? Dead people coming back to life? Obviously, these things could never happen in real life, right?

If you're on top of your game right now, you've realized that of course all those things *can* and *did* happen; we've read

Andrew Boll

about them in the Bible. Unfortunately, our society looks at the inerrant, inspired Word of God as little more than a collection of fairy tales with the occasional dusting of poetry and history. After all, we've been so careful over the years to keep kids from getting confused about what's real and what's make-believe that they absolutely *know* that none of those miraculous events are possible.

While it's important to help your kids understand the difference between fantasy fiction and real life, it's even more important to assure them that what we read in the Bible is real *Life* (in fact, the *Way*, the *Truth*, and the *Life*). Many kids are read fairy tales when they go to bed at night, with their parents dutifully assuring them that it's all just pretend and nothing like that ever happens in the real world. Then they go to Sunday School and hear about talking snakes and donkeys, floating axes, people getting swallowed and regurgitated by giant fish, and pedestrian crossings in the middle of the sea. As far as they're concerned, it's just another fairy tale - and the world is right there to reassure them of that conclusion when they go to school the next day.

Make sure this is a major part of your conversations with your kids about the Bible and about fantasy. It's hard, but you need to help them to know that all of those improbable incidents in the Bible are one hundred percent true. Show them the beautiful way that each one points toward God's plan for our salvation through the life, death, and resurrection of His Son (because they *all* do - ask your pastor for help if you don't

see how with some of them). Don't make the mistake of spending so much time making sure they know what *isn't* true that you forget to tell them what *is*.

Common Christian Pitfalls

Christians, even those who have never touched a fantasy fiction book in their lives, aren't immune to the subtle influences of witchcraft in the way they think and act. Christianity can be twisted and perverted by pagan practices that have invisibly worked their way into the fabric of our faith. Without even realizing it, people sometimes fall into habits that reflect ideas that are not at all inspired by God's Word, but rather by secular, pagan, or even occult messages and philosophies.

We sometimes fall into the ways of "animism," thinking that I need to "work my way up the spiritual ladder" and earn my way into God's good graces, forgetting that I'm saved by grace alone in Christ crucified. Other times, like "shamanists," we place our faith in objects, rituals, or other people instead of God alone, forgetting that "there is one God and one mediator between God and man," Jesus Christ. Sometimes, we even act like members of the "occult," reveling in our "secret knowledge" and forgetting

*"For where God
built a church,
there the Devil
would also build
a chapel."*

~Martin Luther

that Jesus Christ died for *all*, and we have been sent to share the Gospel with everyone we meet.

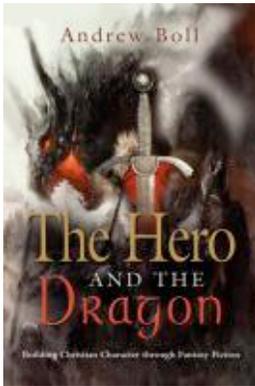
The most prominent of these distortions today is what is commonly termed “prosperity theology.” The basic premise is that people can “manipulate” God into giving them whatever they desire by saying the proper prayers, doing the right actions, or achieving the right frame of mind. This doctrine has enjoyed some popularity for the last hundred years or so, but has become increasingly popular since World War II and especially in the last thirty or forty years.

It doesn’t require a real thorough inspection to see how this idea contradicts God’s Word and reflects the pagan influences of ritualistic witchcraft. When God tells us to “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you as well,” it isn’t a recipe for fiscal success. God’s will for our life is good and loving, and He desires that we be happy, healthy, and successful. Obeying His commandments and precepts naturally leads to prosperity, but not necessarily as the world sees it. In this sinful, fallen world, many Christians have to sacrifice worldly success for the sake of adhering closely to the Father’s will. They are scorned and ridiculed for their faith, and some even lose their reputations, property, or lives because of it. Jesus warns that *persecution* will be a natural result of discipleship, not financial and physical well-being.

When we try to make God into a pagan deity who can be controlled and manipulated through silly incantations, empty

rituals, and hollow servitude, we miss out on the most tremendous blessings He has in store for us. Our Heavenly Father wants *so much* for us in our lives, and not just sports cars, delicious foods, and fancy jewelry. He wants to craft us, to mold us, to make us more like Him, so that we can understand just how wonderful life can be when we walk together in unity – despite whatever suffering or difficult circumstances we may be going through at the time.

The prayer of Jabez in the Bible has been misused by thousands of men and women hoping for a “genie-in-a-bottle” phenomenon. That’s fine. *Ask* God to bless you, by all means. But you should also realize that sometimes God blesses us through pain, loss, and sorrow. Sometimes He gives us the best things in life in a way that will make you want to curse His name during the process. Sometimes cancer will be the blessing you ask for, or unemployment, or loneliness, or any number of fears, doubts, temptations, heartaches, and tragedies. Because the greatest blessing we could ever have, and the thing God desires most for us, is to be closer to Him. Bless me, Lord. *Thy* will be done, not mine. Give me a stronger faith. Take away all trivial distractions and help me to walk with you. Amen.



The Hero and the Dragon is a must read for anyone who enjoys reading fantasy fiction, or struggles with deciding if it is right for them or their children. This book explores many of the common elements in the fantasy genre, examining how they can be used to teach spiritual truths - and how they can be abused to lead young people into spiritual darkness.

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