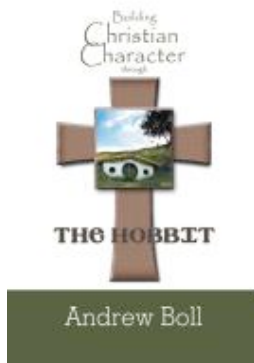


Building  
Christian  
Character  
through



**THE HOBBIT**

Andrew Boll



*Building Christian Character through The Hobbit is a companion book with a built-in Bible-study based upon Bilbo's adventures. Not only does it explore the many ways that Christian virtues are modeled in The Hobbit, but it also examines the terrific parallels between Bilbo's journey and our own walk of faith in Christ. From the first page to the last, Tolkien's original masterwork holds powerful weapons that every Christian warrior should be equipping daily.*

# Building Christian Character through The Hobbit

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**BUILDING CHRISTIAN  
CHARACTER THROUGH  
*THE HOBBIT***

**BIBLE-STUDY AND COMPANION BOOK**

**Andrew Boll**

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## Chapter I

### “An Unexpected Party”

#### **The comforts of home do not a hero make...**

Our story begins with Bilbo Baggins standing outside his front door one morning smoking his pipe. Bilbo fits the bill as an “unlikely hero” in many regards. While many heroes are unlikely because of their young age, Bilbo is even more unlikely because of the fact that he is older – old enough to have settled down rather permanently it would seem. He is wealthy, retired, and respected by the members of his community. It doesn’t seem that he has any reason whatsoever to go on an adventure.

Of course, hobbits really aren’t predisposed toward adventures in the first place, what with their sheltered lifestyles, small size, and parochial frame of mind. They enjoy the quiet comforts of the world; good food, warm fires, comfortable chairs, and smoking assorted types of dried vegetable matter. Even in their work there is a sort of leisurely attitude as they till the earth, tend their animals, and craft useful things slowly and carefully with their own hands.

But of all the hobbits, the Baggins family would be the last place anyone would look if trying to find a bold adventurer. Everyone knew that the Bagginses “never had any adventures or did anything unexpected.” So if you were

expecting an unexpected hero, I expect you'll find that Bilbo meets your expectations perfectly.

**When life hands you wizards, make tea!**

Gandalf is a rather perplexing character. Though not omniscient, he certainly seems to have a fair amount of foresight into the future. He is a guide, a guardian, and a motivator. Whatever else he may be, Gandalf is *good*, through and through. He is wise and caring and even good-humored at times.

Gandalf, however, is the last person that Bilbo wants to have anything to do with. While Bilbo admires and respects Gandalf ("Wizards after all are wizards"), he recognizes him as a force of change, danger, and - dare we say? - excitement. But what Bilbo doesn't recognize is that Gandalf also represents *potential* in his ability to see what others might become, if only they are put into the right situations.

Of course, the Baggins part of Bilbo's character is still very strong at this point in the story. He's quite happy the way he is, and couldn't care less about his potential to become a legendary adventurer. Nor could Gandalf or anyone else at this point convince Bilbo logically that his involvement in this adventure would make a great deal of difference in the fate of the world and serve to overthrow a terrible evil force - even if any of them had known this fact for themselves.

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Already there are forces at work in this story that are beyond Bilbo's or even Gandalf's comprehension, as Gandalf feels inclined to point out in retrospect at the end of their journey. Bilbo's story is about to unfold in such a way as he would never believe even if it were written down and handed to him to read. Gandalf knows that Bilbo needs to go on this journey, that the dwarves will need Bilbo before long, and that the world is going to need a very unlikely hobbit to step up and face this adventure.

Of course, this has nothing to do with you and I, right? Aren't you *always* ready to get up and go when God marks your door and compels you toward a new quest? Eh, me neither. We like the comfort of the predictable life we're living, because we're all Bagginses at heart. But thankfully, through the Holy Spirit, we've got some Tookish blood in us too. God sends us on uncomfortable journeys because He knows what we can become if faced with the right problems: "We know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us" (Romans 5:3-5). He knows that there are others who will need our help in their own journeys: "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Ephesians 2:10). And we can know that our involvement in His adventures is part of a much larger scheme for the good of the whole world: "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).

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So what do we do when the wizard shows up on *our* doorstep and scratches funny marks in our door? Don't fret; just put on a spot of tea like a good fellow. Now sit back and wait for the party to start...

**There must be some kind of mistake...**

Ever have one of those days where the dwarves just seem to keep on coming? "[Bilbo] was beginning to wonder whether a most wretched adventure had not come right into his house." Bilbo is kept quite busy and very uncomfortable trying to accommodate all of his uninvited guests with food, drink, and seating arrangements. His world is suddenly turned upside down like never before, and he is hardly able to bear with the terrible ordeal.

Of course, we have to chuckle at Mr. Baggins here, knowing what's in store for him. If he believes that feeding and cleaning up after a troupe of dwarves is such a difficult task, how will he ever cope with a *real* adventure? Will he one day look back on this unexpected party and wonder how he could ever be such a pathetic, sniveling weakling?

Okay, give Mr. Baggins a break. We've all had those days when our docile domesticity is deluged with the drudgery of dealing with a dwarven downpour. I personally have shaken my fist at the heavens and shouted, "Why, God?!" over seemingly wretched adventures that turned out to be only a prelude to the real journey. God has to ease us out of our comfort zones as a first step in our rebirth as a new and improved person. While the labor pains seem



unbearable at the time, we look back later and shake our heads at all the kicking and screaming we did as He dragged us out the door.

Thankfully, God allows our “Tookish” side to wake up eventually. Even Bilbo Baggins finds himself inexplicably drawn to the quest when he sees the map and the key for the first time and hears the dwarves’ song: “Then something Tookish woke up inside him, and he wished to go and see the great mountains, and hear the pine-trees and the waterfalls, and explore the caves, and wear a sword instead of a walking-stick.” As the Holy Spirit works in our hearts, God effects a miraculous change. One day, we wake up and realize that we actually *like* this adventure He’s sent us on and *want* to keep going forward!

Of course, we still might not be convinced that we’re the right person for the job – and honestly, there’s a good chance no one else believes it either. Bilbo confidently asserts that the dwarves have the wrong house and the wrong hobbit, and the dwarves completely agree with that notion. Gandalf has to remind them all, “I have chosen Mr. Baggins and that ought to be enough for all of you...There is a lot more in him than you guess, and a deal more than he has any idea of himself.”

Gandalf gets angry when the dwarves (and Bilbo) question his choice of burglar. Who do they think he is? Haven’t they known him long enough to trust him? Do any of them have the ability to peer into the subtleties of the misty future? Honestly, it’s downright insulting. We can

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understand this, so why is it so hard for us to realize the foolishness of questioning God when we are called to new adventures in our faith journey? Do we, or anyone else, know better than Him who is right or wrong for the assignment? “Woe to him who quarrels with his Maker...Does the clay say to the potter, ‘What are you making?’ Does your work say, ‘He has no hands?’” (Isaiah 45:9).

A big part of our success on this quest is going to be letting go of our own fear and doubt, and trusting God to lead us in the right direction. Gandalf has a way of getting Bilbo out the door, as we will see in chapter two. Thankfully, God also has a way of sending us scuttling along the path with nary a clue as to how or why we ended up there. Make the most of the journey, and let God worry about the destination.

### **What was that about a dragon, now?**

Nothing takes the Took right out of you like having someone mention a dragon. Somehow, when we’re busy dreaming about the beautiful wilderness, the glittering treasure, and the thrill of adventure, we tend to forget that there are also grave dangers along the way. Vicious monsters, dark forests, perilous mountains; and at the end of it all, the dragon awaits, huge and terrible.

Bilbo’s response to first hearing about these threats is fairly comparable to that of most of us stout-hearted Christian warriors:

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“he began to feel a shriek coming up inside, and very soon it burst out like the whistle of an engine coming out of a tunnel...the poor little hobbit could be seen kneeling on the hearth-rug, shaking like a jelly that was melting. Then he fell flat on the floor, and kept on calling out ‘struck by lightning, struck by lightning!’ over and over again; and that was all they could get out of him for a long time.”

Yes, I’m afraid that’s what we often look like to some of the more seasoned warriors of the faith when we are faced with the dangers of Christian life. We shamefully squawk and gibber and make up excuses for why we can’t pray with certain people watching us, or why we can’t talk about our faith to certain relatives, or why we have to hide the fact that we are Christ’s disciples at work or school. Meanwhile, they sadly look on and shake their heads, wondering, “Will he do, do you think?”

And yet, if there’s one thing we learn from Gandalf at this point, it’s that those same people who are shaking their heads may one day live to thank God for choosing you to go on this journey. There certainly *is* a great deal more inside of you than you realize, because the Holy Spirit has taken up residence in your bodily temple. As you face the dangers of the road, your faith will grow and be strengthened with each difficulty you overcome. In fact, one day *you* might even be the leader that others look to for answers and help!

**Chapter 1 Discussion Points:**

1. Living in a fast-paced, modern world, it's easy to see the appealing (and even God-pleasing) characteristics of a hobbit's lifestyle. Compare their lifestyle with ours, and discuss ways in which this "simpler" life might encourage the development of Christian character (1 Thes. 4:11-12; Matt. 6:28-34). In a perfect world, would people still have to work with their hands? (Gen. 2:15)
2. What traits does Gandalf possess - or what actions does he perform - that distinguish him as an agent of the "Divine"? Does he have certain "angelic" qualities or responsibilities? (John 14:16-19; Proverbs 16:9; Psalm 119:105)
3. What are the dangers of Christians becoming too "comfortable" in their life or their walk with God? Does being comfortable necessarily mean that something is wrong? (1 Cor. 10:11-12; Amos 6:1; Deut 33:12)
4. What are three reasons why God might push us outside of our comfort zones or allow us to face uncomfortable (even painful) situations? (Heb. 12:5-13; James 1:2-5; Is. 48:10; 1 Peter 1:6-7)

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5. Bilbo's involvement in this great adventure is a result of his Tookish blood and Gandalf's encouragement, neither of which lie in his own power or control. What gives us the power, strength, and motivation to walk with God? Is it our own choosing, or is it something outside of ourselves? (John 15:16; 2 Cor. 12:9; Acts 1:8; 2 Peter 1:3; Eph. 2:8-10)
  
6. Can you think of any "uncomfortable" situations from your past where you did a great deal of "grumbling and dratting" toward God? How do you feel about that now, looking back on those situations and your response toward God? Were you eventually able to see God's purpose in these situations, or are you still waiting for that to be revealed? Supposing His purpose never *is* revealed, how would that affect your trust in Him? (Jer. 29:11; Acts 26:16; Romans 8:28; Deut. 29:29; Hab. 2:3)
  
7. What can this teach us about facing whatever God calls us to do in the future? (Psalm 138:8; Psalm 57:2; Phil. 4:13; Joshua 1:9; Prov. 3:5-6)



## Chapter II

### “Roast Mutton”

#### **This isn't so bad after all!**

Bilbo's journey starts off with a great deal of fear and discomfort. He is practically thrown out of his own house by Gandalf without any of the comforts or “necessities” that he usually takes with him on the road. Of course, if he knew more about adventures, he would have realized that tobacco and pocket-handkerchiefs are hardly the most important items to have with you on a quest of this sort.

All the same, things brighten up considerably when Gandalf provides Bilbo with his forgotten personal effects. For a while the journey isn't so bad after all. After all, Bilbo has the satisfaction of knowing that he's now travelled well beyond the borders of the Shire and his own comfort zone, the thrill of exploring new lands, and the prestige of being part of a dangerous expedition.

Of course, it's easy to pat yourself on the back for travelling beyond your own personal comfort zone, so long as the travelling remains comfortable. And it's also easy to compliment yourself on embarking on a dangerous journey, so long as any actual danger remains at a distance. But, alas, ere long the weather will turn and trolls will rear their ugly heads.

**And then the wizard made himself disappear...**

When things start to get really uncomfortable and danger seems imminent, Bilbo and the dwarves notice that Gandalf is missing. This greatly vexes them. After all, he should be here, lighting their fires and finding them dry ground and helping to set up camp - all *very* important tasks; no doubt much more important that whatever it is he's off doing at the moment! And then they get annoyed with him, remember how he had eaten and talked more than any of them only to disappear "Just when a wizard would have been most useful." They obviously don't hold wizards in very high estimation.

What they will soon learn is that Gandalf did *not* abandon them, and he certainly isn't shirking the most important tasks to attend to some other frivolous business. Right now, his business is planning for their long-term survival and safety, wizards tending to be somewhat better-than-average when it comes to critical foresight. But the rest of the group has the short-sighted tendency to regard whatever fear or discomfort they are experiencing *right now* as the most deserving of any help or attention.

Not that we're really all that different. How many times, along our own journeys, do we suddenly look around and, behold, the Lord has abandoned us! Look what I'm forced to go through *on His behalf* and where is He to help me? And after that time I've spent in church and all that money I've put in the offering plate and all those prayers I've said! Just when He would've been most useful, too.



In our own shortsightedness, we don't recognize just how trivial our current problems are in the grand scheme of things. We have a hard time believing that there could be items of greater concern to our own spiritual survival and safety than our present comfort. And we would never guess that God has allowed us to go so far as being captured by trolls for our own spiritual development, nor that He is watching it all from nearby, ready to help and rescue us from danger.

**He reached round his back, and pulled out a sack, and said, "What a good thief am I!"**

"Now it is the burglar's turn."

With these words, the adventure suddenly becomes *very* uncomfortable for Bilbo. You mean I'm actually going to have to *do* something on this journey? All the same, off he goes, and thankfully he does have some natural gifts to help him creep stealthily up to the trolls' camp. He still has a lot to learn about being a good burglar, but he's heard a lot about the skills of legendary thieves and figures, how hard can it be? And after all, he has to prove himself to the dwarves, right?

Proving himself proves to be something for which he would later reprove himself, after he's improved a bit. His pride certainly gets him into trouble here, and he pays a heavy troll...er, toll. But then again, without these early failures, he would never gain the wisdom and experience to become a really great burglar and leader. Thankfully, at this

point he still has his faithful dwarven companions to come to his rescue, and they still have Gandalf to come to *their* rescue.

Young warriors of the faith certainly make plenty of foolish mistakes, often resulting from their own pride or arrogance. Not like us old faith warriors. We're simply too wise and experienced to fall victim to the trap of overconfidence. Right. So thankfully, God lets us safely fail plenty of times, all along equipping us with the skills that we will really need later on in the journey. He gives us faithful companions to help us through the difficulties we face. And He Himself is close at hand in Spirit and in Word, the dawn of His Gospel Light petrifying and destroying our sins and failures.

### **To the victor go the spoils!**

After successfully defeating the trolls (hmm...), Bilbo and the dwarves are able to enjoy the fruits of their labor. They warm themselves by the fire. They find rest and refreshment in the trolls' food, drink and shelter. But thanks to Bilbo, they gain much more than that.

Bilbo finds a key on the ground that had fallen out of William's pocket, granting them access to the trolls' hidden lair. Inside, they find treasure – their first loot of the adventure, and a terrific reward for a victory that really wasn't even theirs to begin with. But even more importantly, they find several weapons that will soon prove to be a great

boon against their foes, although they cannot currently fully appreciate the significance of these newly acquired arms.

On our journey of faith as well, we often find that God gives us rest and solace after enduring a difficult trial. We are strengthened and renewed by the good spiritual gifts with which our soul is fed following these minor victories (which are often not even *our* victories at all). But looking at these challenges through the eyes of faith also enables us to find the key to unlocking a much greater treasure, one that will last for the rest of our lifetime.

As we see how God is using us and working for good through our trials and difficulties, the Holy Spirit heaps upon us the treasure of faith. Trusting in God and persevering steadfastly in the face of pain, sorrow, and temptation will yield a rich reward when we see how God safely brings us through these troubles. As we see how God works for the good of us and all those around us through our tribulations, we begin to trust God even more in the future. Finally, God strengthens our faith so much that we can trust Him even when we can't possibly see how any good could come of our present suffering.

In addition to this great treasure, God equips us with new and powerful weapons that will enable us to confront even greater foes. While we may not yet understand just what exactly God has placed into our hands, you can be sure that this weapon will prove useful in the spiritual battles ahead. With it, we will be better able to guard and protect our own faith, as well as to strike out against the evils that

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assault our neighbors and come to their aid. The more we use these gifts, the more skillfully we will be able to wield them when the time for battle comes.

When these early struggles are over and we are enjoying the spoils of God's bounty, it becomes much easier to look back and see how God was looking ahead in our lives, looking behind at our weaknesses, and generally maintaining a presence in every aspect. Though we have questioned His ways and methods, we start to see just how great and magnificent His wisdom truly is. And so we faithfully follow Him onward, trusting that soon enough He will lead us to green pastures and quiet waters, if only for a short rest before setting out once again!

**Chapter 2 Discussion Points:**

1. Has there ever been a time when you felt like God abandoned you? What do we need to remember during times like these? (Psalm 27:14; Psalm 34:17-19; Is. 55:8; Is. 41:10; Deut. 31:6; Prov. 3:5-6)
2. Has a spirit of overconfidence ever gotten you into trouble along your Christian journey? Why should we *always* be on guard against temptation? (1 Peter 5:8; 2 Tim. 2:22)
3. What are some ways we can defend ourselves against the Devil's attacks? (Matt. 26:41; Psalm 119:9-11; 1 Cor. 6:18; 1 Cor. 10:13; Gal. 5:16; Gal. 6:1; James 4:7)
4. How are the victories which God is accomplishing in us today part of the process of "sanctification" (i.e. "being made holy; growing in divine grace")? How does this process occur? What does it look like? (John 17:17; Gal. 2:20; 1 Thes. 4:3-7; 1 Thes. 5:12-24; Hebrews 10:14-17, 22-25; Col. 3:5; Rom. 12:1-2)



## Chapter III

### “A Short Rest”

#### **Are we there yet?**

As Bilbo spies the mountains looming ahead of them, he begins to believe that their journey is nearly at an end and that the final challenge lies just ahead. That’s when Balin informs him that, no, that isn’t *The Mountain*; in fact, it’s only the beginning of a series of much larger mountains that they must soon cross. And even when those are behind, they will really just be getting started on their trek to the Lonely Mountain. Bilbo’s heart sinks, and “just at that moment he felt more tired than he ever remembered feeling before.”

Soon, Bilbo will realize that even the mountain he can see ahead is a good ways off yet. There are a great many hills and valleys that they must navigate before they begin their ascent of the Misty Mountains. But hiding in one of those valleys is Rivendell, the Last Homely House and the dwelling of Elrond and the elves.

Each new challenge that confronts us on our spiritual journey feels like it must be the greatest we will ever be asked to overcome. Having never seen mountains before, how are we to know just how huge and menacing they can be? Yet as we crest each peak, we are met with the disheartening view of another ravine and an even taller

mountain beyond. Like Bilbo, we begin to feel very weary of this wretched adventure.

Thankfully, our Guide knows that we need rest and renewal. Among these peaks and valleys, He occasionally leads us to a place of refuge where we can gather strength and renew our hopes. Here, good folks refresh our dwindling packs with the Bread of Life. And although it is difficult to leave such places, we do so in high spirits and with fervent energy, ready to struggle onward until we come to the next place of rest and sanctuary.

**Oh, for the good old days...**

Already for the second time, we find Bilbo wishing and longing for his nice, warm hobbit-hole, dreaming of sitting beside the fireplace and comfortably smoking his pipe. He cannot imagine that whatever he will gain from this adventure will be worth all the trouble and discomfort he is going through, and right now the end is nowhere in sight. Although he doesn't realize it, though, Bilbo has already gained much on this short journey. He has seen and experienced things that he never dreamed he would in his lifetime. He has been tested and changed, so that he is now a better hobbit who has exhibited courage and fortitude that he never knew he possessed.

In the midst of difficulties, it can be easy to see all the trouble and pain and unwittingly look past the character and values that we have gained. Of course we like to dream about happier, peaceful times – sometimes it's the only thing



that keeps us sane! Home and the “ordinary life” pull at us constantly, like a giant rubber band that stretches more tightly the further away we travel, tempting us to let go and be slingshotted back to where we came from. But like Bilbo, we must venture forth, keeping our eyes closely fixed on the path (or at least wearily trudging our feet in the general direction of our Leader’s voice...).

### **A little help, please?**

Elrond and the elves are able to do much for Bilbo and the dwarves. They give them rest, food, and provisions for the journey ahead. The group learns which paths are safe and which ones are dangerous for their journey through the Misty Mountains. Elrond explains to them the origin and significance of their newly acquired weapons, knowledge which will help them to wield these swords with maximum effectiveness. But most of all, Elrond reveals (with the help of Providence) the existence of “moon-letters” on Thorin’s map; vital information that will assist them in their infiltration of Smaug’s lair.

Bilbo and his friends are fortified and equipped in many ways during their stay in Rivendell. Rather than just taking advantage of the food and hospitality of the elves, they also seek their advice and guidance, as well as general wisdom imparted by the tales and history they tell. As we stop along the way on our spiritual journey to be fed and nourished with God’s Word and rest in His sanctuary, we mustn’t forget to also reap the benefits of wise leaders and elders in the Church. Godly men and women who will offer advice

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and encouragement can always be found in your congregation. Friends and family members can also be sources of prayerful support and compassion. And believe it or not, your pastor – busy as he is – will be delighted when you come to him for help and guidance before setting off on the next leg of your journey!

You know that there are tall, menacing mountains ahead, with wild lands yet beyond them still. There are also many dangers and challenges that aren't visible yet – tunnels, forests, monsters, overly-political wood-elves, and so forth. Why not take every opportunity to fully recharge and stock up on supplies and advice? God allows you to face many problems and obstacles for your own good and development; why should we think that His purpose for the safe havens is different in any way?

**Chapter 3 Discussion Points:**

1. What words of comfort and encouragement does God have for those who seem to be crossing mountain after mountain? (John 14:1,27; Is. 40:30-31; Matt. 11:28-30; Deut. 33:27; Psalm 9:9-10; Psalm 46:1-3; Jer. 32:27)
2. Where should we go to seek rest and refuge along our Christian journey? What is our source of rest and peace? (Psalm 37:7; Psalm 62:1-2; John 14:27; Phil. 4:6-7; Heb. 4:9-11; 1 Peter 5:7; 1 John 3:17-20)
3. How are we fed and equipped for the journey ahead during our times of rest? (John 6:35; John 4:10-14; Psalm 119:103; Matt. 4:4; Matt. 26:26-28; Acts 2:42; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; Prov. 11:14; Prov. 12:15)
4. What is the danger of longing for an “easier life” or “the good old days” in the face of spiritual or physical difficulties? How should we face this danger? (Ecc. 7:10; Gal. 4:9; Heb. 12:1; 2 Tim. 1:7; Col. 3:5-10; Luke 9:57-62)
5. Where can we look for Godly advice and encouragement? What kinds of dangers are involved with seeking guidance from the wrong people? (Prov. 1:7; Prov. 3:1-8; Prov. 12:26; Psalm 1; Psalm 119:105; 1 Kings 12:6-8; Jer. 3:15; Eph. 6:1-4; 1 Tim. 5:17; 2 Tim. 3:16; Heb. 13:17)



## Chapter IV “Over Hill and Under Hill”

**Up, up, and away!**

The opening paragraph in chapter four is a *strikingly* beautiful allegory for Christian life and faith. As we peer at the mountains before us – life, with its great, monstrous summits that will test and try our faith in every way – we see many paths winding up toward the crests. Indeed, many will tell you, “Take whatever path you choose! They all end up at the same destination anyway.” This, dear friends, is a deadly lie.

Though Bilbo would not have realized it without the wisdom of Gandalf and Elrond, there is really only one path that will take them safely to the other side. Oh, there will be troubles and difficulties even along *that* way, but the other paths all lead to certain failure and death. However, Bilbo knows enough to know how little he knows at this point in his journey. He trusts those who are older, wiser, and more experienced; and by their guidance, he avoids the traps and pitfalls of all the other roads.

Likewise, we know that there is only one Way to the Father, and that is Jesus Christ. It’s easy for us to get confused and start up the mountain by some other path, trusting in our own knowledge, skill, or strength to get us safely through. That’s why it’s so important to seek the

counsel of wise, Godly friends who can redirect your steps to the life-saving Word of God. Only by walking in faith by God's grace will we successfully navigate the Devil's twisting, worldly labyrinth before us and come safely to the other side.

### **Feeling boulder yet?**

Bilbo soon encounters new and terrible threats; icy cold, gusty winds, violent storms, and giants hurling enormous rocks. Finally, the dwarves and Bilbo seek shelter in a cave that appears safe and deserted. Along this journey, sleep has been one of the comforts that Bilbo regrets being deprived of. Now we find that his inability to fall asleep quickly or slumber soundly saves the whole group from certain disaster.

Like Bilbo's group, we are often battered and buffeted by the storms of life. We seek shelter in all kinds of things, from books and games and hobbies to meditation and philosophy. These "caves" present a difficult dilemma. As Gandalf realizes, you never really know how far back they reach or what kind of nasty things could be living inside them already. What may appear quite harmless on the outside could be infested with spiritual and physical dangers lurking in the shadows or behind false walls.

We need to be extremely careful and discerning when choosing what kinds of things we are going to use to escape the pressures and woes of life. While we *do* need a place in which we can rest and recharge, we might find even greater

danger there than outside in the raging storm. As Gandalf urges, we need to *thoroughly* investigate these areas of shelter before letting our guard down. Even the churches we attend, in which we seek spiritual rest and revitalization, must be examined closely in light of God's Word, making sure that they firmly adhere to sound doctrine.

Next, we need to remain alert and ready to act - or evacuate. If a hobby or activity takes your mind *too* much off the quest, it's probably best to look for another cave. If there is any trace of spiritual goblins in the books you are reading or the philosophy you are studying, high-tail it out of there as fast as you can. If the congregation you've been attending preaches any doctrine other than salvation by Christ alone, be ready to confront the threat or abandon the dwelling - depending on your strength, company, and circumstances.

Finally, don't sleep too soundly when you finally bed down. Dangers and threats don't always present themselves right up front. Sometimes they like to wait until those seeking shelter in their cave are lulled to sleep and helpless to defend themselves. Bilbo remains alert enough to warn Gandalf and his friends of the sudden assault, and this makes a great deal of difference in the long run. "So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled" (1 Thessalonians 5:6).

### **Taking the scenic route...**

Despite Bilbo's timely warnings, he and the dwarves are captured by the goblins and led down into the heart of the

mountain. Their tools, provisions, and ponies are all taken by the goblins, never to be returned. Not only that, but if they ever do escape, they are lost deep within the goblin tunnels, surrounded by enemies and darkness. Things look pretty bad.

But they could be worse. Gandalf is still out there, and he comes to rescue them all once again. Gandalf is clever enough to make the best out of a terrible situation, and he does a bang-up job on this occasion. He turns their capture and inevitable torture and imprisonment into a daring rescue in which the goblins suffer a terrible defeat with the loss of their leader. Although their provisions and ponies have been confiscated, Gandalf rescues their magical swords and equips them once again to defend themselves. Though they are lost and hotly pursued by raging goblins, Gandalf leads them successfully through the tunnels and to the other side of the mountains.

There are consequences for their carelessly being captured, however. They will have to endure a great deal of hunger and want before they reach the next place of refuge. They will have to contend with an ongoing pursuit by the bloodthirsty goblins for a while. And worst of all, they will have to figure out what to do about the loss of their burglar, Mr. Baggins, who they dropped in the darkness while fleeing. But even this difficulty may produce a remarkable benefit in the long run...

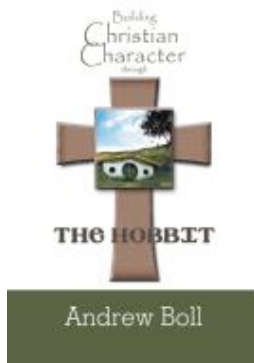
Similarly, we sometimes find ourselves in a tough situation because we let our spiritual guard down. We've



been captured by the enemy, and now we must endure patiently while we wait upon the Lord for rescue and deliverance. We can be sure that there will be consequences. We will have to deal with some discomfort for a while, and may be faced with some difficult decisions about how to correct our mistakes. But all the same, God is clever enough that He can not only rescue us from the darkness, but also do it in such a way that we will come out of the mess equipped like never before to accomplish the tasks set before us. Like Bilbo, we are bound to discover wonderful things, even while wandering in fear and ignorance through the darkness of our sin; although we may not understand what they are or how to use them until we are led once again back into the light...

**Chapter 4 Discussion Points:**

1. On our Christian journey, what is the *only* path that leads to life? (John 14:6; 1 John 5:12; Acts 4:12; 1 Tim. 2:5; Matt. 7:13-14)
2. What are some of the “false paths” that the world directs us toward? How can we identify and avoid them? (Rom. 16:17-18; 2 Tim. 4:3-4; Col. 2:8; 1 John 4:1; Matt. 7:15-20; Gal. 1:6-9; 2 John 1:7; Eph. 5:6-20)
3. Places of rest and refuge are a good thing, but how can some of these become a spiritual hazard? (Ecc. 9:7-10; Luke 16:13; Luke 12:33; Heb. 13:15-16)
4. How can we remain vigilant when taking shelter in hobbies or recreation? (Matt. 6:33; Rom. 12:1,6-8; Rom. 13:11-14; Phil. 4:8-9; Acts 20:35)
5. One of the biggest dangers we will encounter on our Christian journey is despair over our sin and shortcomings. What has God told us that will help guard our hearts against this despair? (2 Tim. 2:13; 1 John 1:9; Is. 43:25; Acts 3:19; 2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 1:7; Dan. 9:9; Psalm 103:12; Micah 7:18-19; Rom. 3:23-24)
6. Knowing all this, should we be dismayed when we face temporal consequences for our sin? How should we respond? (2 Sam. 12:11-14; Gal. 6:7; Gen. 3:17-19; Rom. 13:4; Is. 59, 61:1-3)



*Building Christian Character through The Hobbit is a companion book with a built-in Bible-study based upon Bilbo's adventures. Not only does it explore the many ways that Christian virtues are modeled in The Hobbit, but it also examines the terrific parallels between Bilbo's journey and our own walk of faith in Christ. From the first page to the last, Tolkien's original masterwork holds powerful weapons that every Christian warrior should be equipping daily.*

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