

THE LORD OF THE RINGS

the fellowship of the ring

study guide

By *michael s.
gilleland*

for the novel by J.R.R. Tolkien



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Progeny Press

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The Fellowship of the Ring Study Guide

A Progeny Press Study Guide

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Synopsis

The Fellowship of the Ring begins where *The Hobbit* left off: with a quaint little hobbit named Bilbo Baggins who has happened to gain possession of a magic Ring. Bilbo is now 111 years old, but he doesn't look a day over 50, which many of his neighbors consider quite unfair. But Bilbo is not his old self; he feels stretched quite thin, he tells his friend, Gandalf the wizard, "like butter that has been scraped over too much bread." Bilbo decides to leave his home in the Shire to travel, and he gives his home, Bag End, and all his possessions to his nephew and heir, Frodo Baggins.

But it is difficult for Bilbo to leave the Ring. Bilbo wants it—it is *his*, after all—his precious. The echo in Bilbo's words and manner of the evil, loathsome creature who had last possessed the Ring awaken fear in Gandalf. What influence has it had on Bilbo? After much persuasion he convinces Bilbo to leave the Ring, but he warns Frodo to never wear it. And Gandalf goes in search of more information about this Ring of Frodo's.

What he learns brings horror to the young hobbit and the peaceful Shire. For the Ring is the One Ring, created by the Dark Lord Sauron in ages past to bring all people under his dominion. It corrupts all who wear it, and it longs for its maker. Lost for generations, the Ring was thought by the Dark Lord to have been destroyed, but Sauron now knows it has been found. And he knows who has it.

So begins the quest of a small hobbit to destroy a token of immense power and evil. Crossing Middle-earth with a few loyal friends, chased by the Ringwraiths—once-human servants of the Dark Lord—Frodo makes for Rivendell, the Elvish sanctuary of wisdom and power. There he hopes to deliver the Ring to those who can better use it and judge its fate.

Arriving mortally wounded, Frodo finds that others also have come to Rivendell, for the Dark Lord is again growing in strength and influence, and the people have come for counsel. In a council of the wisest of the four free races—Elves, Dwarves, Men, and Hobbits—Frodo discovers that he alone can dispose of the Ring—by delivering it to the source of its power, the land of the Dark Lord Sauron, and casting it into the fires in which it was made.

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With reluctance, but recognizing the need, Frodo accepts this charge, and the council gathers a company of nine, led by Gandalf, to go with Frodo—the Fellowship of the Ring. They accompany Frodo across perilous mountain passes and down into the ruins of ancient Dwarf halls deep in the roots of the mountains, but not all survive to reach the outer doors. And of those who survive, not all remain true.

Though they find comfort and rest for a time in the golden forest of Lothlórien, center of Elven power, they must eventually leave to continue their journey and decide how best to carry the Ring to its doom.

The Lord of the Rings continues in *The Two Towers* and *The Return of the King*.

BOOK I

Chapters 6–8

North, south, and east, beyond the wall the fog was thick, cold and white. The air was silent, heavy and chill. The hobbits sprang to their feet in alarm, and ran to the western rim. They found that they were upon an island in the fog.

Questions:

1. How did the hobbits enter the Old Forest?
2. What happens to the paths in the Old Forest as the hobbits follow them?
3. How do Frodo and his friends get “herded” down to the Withywindle?
4. What does Old Man Willow do to the hobbits?

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5. What happens in the Downs that delays the hobbits until sunset?

6. List three odd traits or powers of Tom Bombadil.

7. What confuses the hobbits' sense of direction in the Old Wood? What confuses their sense of direction as they cross the Downs?

Thinking About the Story:

8. How might the Old Forest be seen as a metaphor for Frodo's situation or mindset since learning the true nature of the Ring?

9. As Frodo and his friends travel through the Forest, they begin to feel an oppressive stillness that weighs on them. In an attempt to encourage them, Frodo sings a song. Why does Frodo's attempt fail? What was wrong with the song?

10. It can be argued that Chapters 6–8 give very little plot progression. The hobbits leave their relatively sheltered life in the Shire, where life is plain, obvious, and

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simple, and things are pretty much as they appear. The Shire is a practical place. But when they leave the Shire, Frodo and his friends immediately step into what might be characterized as a malicious fairy tale—the very ground and plants are alive and malevolent. They are rescued from this natural evil by Tom Bombadil, who spends the next couple of days telling them stories of the deep past, of the history of the land and trees, of the rise and fall of men and kingdoms. After they leave Tom Bombadil, they travel through the Downs, a region of death and hoarded treasure, and once again have to be rescued by Tom.

Though there is some interesting narrative in this section, the plot all but stands still. What do you think the author was trying to accomplish in these chapters?

11. *Anthropomorphism* is the giving of human characteristics to a nonhuman object or creature. Mickey Mouse is an anthropomorphic mouse because he talks, acts, and dresses as a person would. What is the most striking example of anthropomorphism in these chapters? Give descriptive examples from the book to support your answer.

12. Examine the words and speech of Tom Bombadil. What makes his speech different from that of others in these chapters? See if you can write a sentence that sounds like Tom's speech.

13. In *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, edited by Humphrey Carpenter (1981, Houghton Mifflin), Tolkien writes

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Tom Bombadil is not an important person—to the narrative. I suppose he has some importance as a ‘comment.’ I mean, . . . he represents something that I feel important, though I would not be prepared to analyze the feeling precisely. . . . The story is cast in terms of a good side, and a bad side, beauty against ruthless ugliness, tyranny against kingship, moderated freedom with content against compulsion that has long lost any object save mere power, and so on; but both sides in some degree, conservative or destructive, want a measure of control. [B]ut if you have, as it were taken a ‘vow of poverty,’ renounced control, and take your delight in things for themselves without reference to yourself, watching, observing, and to some extent knowing, then the question of the rights and wrongs of power and control might become utterly meaningless to you, and the means of power quite valueless. It is a natural pacifist view, which always arises in the mind when there is a war. [pp. 178, 179]

I don’t think Tom needs philosophizing about, and is not improved by it. But many have found him an odd or indeed discordant ingredient. . . . But I kept him in, and as he was, because he represents certain things otherwise left out He is then an . . . exemplar, a particular embodying of pure (real) natural science: the spirit that desires knowledge of other things, their history and nature, because they are ‘other’ and wholly independent of the enquiring mind, a spirit coeval with the rational mind, and entirely unconcerned with ‘doing’ anything with the knowledge. [p. 192]

What do these statements tell you about Tolkien’s intent for Tom Bombadil? Are the two statements compatible? Do you think Tolkien was successful in communicating both of these intents; or was he more successful in one than the other? Use specific examples from the book to support your answers.

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Dig Deeper:

14. Though Frodo and his friends are trying to get to Rivendell, they really have no clear, specific idea of how to get there; and since Gandalf has disappeared they are relatively leaderless. When they try to get their bearings in the Old Forest, they find the horizons obscured by haze:

[T]he autumn haze still prevented them from seeing much in other directions. . . . Northwards, where they looked most hopefully, they could see nothing that might be the line of the great East Road, for which they were making. They were on an island in a sea of trees, and the horizon was veiled.

They have a similar problem in the Downs, though they think they see their goal in sight:

Certainly the distances had now all become hazy and deceptive, but there could be no doubt that the Downs were coming to an end. A long valley lay below them winding away northwards, until it came to an opening between two steep shoulders. Beyond, there seemed to be no more hills. . . . The hobbits sprang to their feet in alarm, and ran to the western rim. They found that they were upon an island in the fog.

In both circumstances, Frodo and his friends try to guide themselves by their surroundings, “feeling their way by the rise and fall of the ground.” What would have solved their problems with losing their way?

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15. Have you ever been in a situation in which you knew your final goal, but you couldn't figure out how to get there, or in which you felt as if you were in a fog and feeling your way by "the rise and fall of the ground"—just trying to figure it out as you went? What did you do? How did you cope?

16. Read Judges 2:6–23, 3:5–6, 21:25. How were the experiences of the Israelites in these passages similar, in a spiritual and moral sense, to the hobbits' experiences in the Old Forest and the Downs?

17. Sometimes in our lives we can feel as if we are wandering spiritually or emotionally, much as Frodo and his friends wandered lost in the Forest and Downs in these chapters. Read Philippians 2:1–8; 2 Timothy 3:16, 17; James 1:22–25; and Hebrews 12:2, 3. How do these scriptures relate to such times in our lives? What maps or landmarks do they give us?

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Optional Activities

1. Examine and evaluate the use of color in Chapter 7. Why do you think Tolkien concentrates so much on color in his descriptions in this chapter? Does Tolkien concentrate on any particular colors? If so, what colors, and why do you think he chose these colors?
2. Find the passage in which Tom Bombadil first appears to Frodo and Sam and use the description there to draw and color a picture of Tom.
3. As a bit of fun, and to experience something of what the hobbits went through in their travels through the Old Forest and the Downs, go outside or go into a large, empty room. Pick out a destination across the room or a fairly short distance away, then pull a hat down over the students' eyes so they can see only their feet and the ground immediately around them but nothing else. Have the students try to walk to the destination without looking up to get any bearings beyond the first look. How well do they keep their course?

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7. As the Company reaches the Bridge, a Balrog appears. Gandalf challenges the Balrog in the middle of the Bridge as the rest of his companions hurry across. He shatters the bridge with his staff, but as the Balrog falls into the fires of the abyss, he curls his whip around Gandalf's legs and drags Gandalf down with him.

Thinking About the Story:

8. The title, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, refers to Frodo and his eight companions; they are the "fellowship"—the "Company of the Ring," as Elrond names them. You may wish to give partial credit if the student answers that *The Lord of the Rings* refers to Sauron, though *The Lord of the Rings* is the name of the trilogy, not this specific novel.

9. The characters, particularly Gimli, speak of Caradhras as being cruel and taking actions against them: "Caradhras has not forgiven us. He has more snow yet to fling at us"; "It is the ill will of Caradhras. He does not love Elves and Dwarves"; "Caradhras has forgotten"; "as if Caradhras was satisfied that the invaders had been beaten off"; "Caradhras had defeated them." The snow and difficulties the Company has on the mountain's sides seem to bear out the idea that the mountain was fighting them.

10. After the fight, there were no bodies of dead wolves, and Legolas's arrows were lying undamaged on the ground about the hill-top. With any normal foe, there should have been dead and injured after the battle. Even if the wolves had somehow taken the dead and injured away with them, the arrows would have gone in the bodies. The arrows lying about the hill-top imply that the bodies were not normal, and possibly simply dissipated. Particularly peculiar is the arrow that was burned up, because the flaming arrow had "plunged into the heart of a great wolf-chieftain." There would have been no easy way to remove the arrowhead without a shaft.

11. Gandalf is pretty clearly the leader of the Company of the Ring, though it is not obvious how this actually happened. From the very beginning, his leadership seemed to be assumed, though he does consult with Aragorn. At times he calls for group decisions, but he very clearly makes his own desires and preferences known, and does not hesitate to make decisions when the need arises. Gandalf often literally leads, going first on their path, but in the more general sense the other members of the Company generally defer to Gandalf's judgment and decisions.

12. Moria had been the center of the Dwarf kingdom. There the Dwarves discovered the metal mithril, which was much prized by everyone for its beauty, strength, and malleability, making it perfect for art, jewelry, armor, and more. The Dwarves dug deeper and deeper, until they awakened an evil creature bound deep in the earth. The Balrog apparently terrorized the Dwarves, the Dwarves left Moria, and Moria gained an evil reputation.

13. Boromir seems quite proud and self-centered, or ethnocentric, tending to assume that his experiences and beliefs are true beyond question and tending to rely on his own experiences and strength. He seems to believe that Gondor alone has been protecting the rest of the free peoples. Though it was his brother who dreamed a prophecy, Boromir takes it upon himself to travel to find the answer. He repeatedly says that if Gondor falls or falters, the world is lost; he seems to believe no one else works as hard or faces such hardship as he and his people. He doubts Aragorn, even though he sees the fulfillment of prophecy and the dream before him. He refuses to believe that there can be any fault with those with whom he is familiar (for example, Rohan). He seems to believe primarily in strength—his own and his people's—and he cannot see the purpose in destroying the Ring; he wishes to use it. He does not seem to trust the judgment and experience of Gandalf and Aragorn, trusting only to his own experience. He cannot understand why the company cannot simply return by the route by which he traveled to Rivendell, even though others have made plain that the situation has changed. There is no doubt that Boromir is a strong, brave, and honorable man, but he trusts too much in his own perspective and strength.

14. Answers may vary. Though it is clear that at one time Dwarves and Elves seemed to have an amicable relationship, there seems to be a long-standing rift dating far, far back in time, the origins of which are unclear. It seems that Gimli is more defensive about the situation than Legolas, though both chafe under it ("It was not the fault of the Dwarves that the friendship waned," said Gimli. "I have not heard it was the fault of the Elves," said Legolas.)

15. Two incidents in particular stand out as foreshadowing Gandalf's death: As the companions for Frodo are chosen, Elrond says, "Gandalf will go; for this shall be his great task, and maybe the end of his labours." As the Company was deciding on their route, Aragorn says, "It is not of the Ring, nor of us others that I am thinking now, but of you, Gandalf. And I say to you: if you pass the doors of Moria, beware!" Students may find other examples. Accept any that may reasonably apply.

Dig Deeper:

16. In both Books I and II Merry and Pippin are refusing to be left behind. In both cases Frodo tells them they should not come with him because of the danger, and they respond that they wish to accompany him *because* of the danger, for he is their friend and they wish to be with him and help him in his troubles. Answers will vary about the emotional and

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practical effects of their support. The support and love of his friends must give Frodo confidence and a deep sense of comfort on which he can draw during the times of hardship and danger. In a practical way, having their support and knowing they are with him may also help him focus on the bigger issues of his quest—he knows he does not have to worry about the determination and support of those with him.

17. Answers will vary. Gandalf several times seems to be insulting or jibing Pippin (Pippin: “There must be someone with intelligence in the party.” Gandalf: “Then you certainly will not be chosen, Peregrin Took!”; Pippin: “What are you going to do then?” Gandalf: “Knock on the doors with your head, Peregrin Took. But if that does not shatter them, and I am allowed a little peace from foolish questions, I will seek for the opening words”; when Pippin dropped a rock down a well, Gandalf responds: “Fool of a Took! This is a serious journey, not a hobbit walking-party. Throw yourself in next time, and then you will be no further nuisance. Now be quiet!”). However, Pippin rarely seems to take offense, and seems to be quite willing to speak up to Gandalf. At the doors of Moria, Pippin is “undaunted by the wizard’s bristling brows.” And after Gandalf calls Pippin a fool for dropping the rock into the well, Gandalf speaks to him “in a kindly tone” and takes Pippin’s place on watch. The two seem to have a comfortable friendship that accepts and perhaps even thrives on bantering. This might imply a special kind of intimacy, but such bantering can also lead to hurt feelings. In general, insulting or repeatedly teasing friends is a bad idea, even as a game. What may seem to be light-hearted teasing to one person may hurt another person. Such bantering can begin as fun, but over time develop into truly barbed or cutting exchanges.

18. The attributes of love listed in verses 4–7 are the attributes that Gandalf believes Elrond should trust more than wisdom. Wisdom can fail or be insufficient, but love, expressed by Frodo’s friends in their actions, means they will stick with him through everything, protecting, trusting, hoping, persevering. The verses and Gandalf also note that prophecies and knowledge have their limits, and we cannot see all things clearly, but love gives strength when all else fails.

19. Paraphrases will vary. In essence, Elrond is saying that Frodo is bound by oath to complete his mission and never turn back, or at least to never give up the Ring; the others are to accompany him freely as far as possible, but they are free to turn aside or return at any time. Gimli says a person that leaves when things get difficult is a coward or traitor. Elrond says a person should not pledge to something when he cannot see the consequences or the full situation. Gimli responds that a person may gain strength from such a pledge. Elrond says such a pledge may make a person despair and fail in a time of hardship. Personal answers will vary.

20. Interpretations may vary, but should be along these lines: If we make an oath or promise we are to keep it, period, particularly if the promise is made to God. Breaking a promise is sin, and God equates breaking a promise with being a fool. It is better to not vow than to make a vow and not keep it, says Solomon; but Jesus and James are more direct: don’t vow, treat all your statements as oaths or pledges and keep your word.

21. Gandalf put the lives and well-being of his friends and companions before his own life. Though he seemed to have little hope of success (“I have never felt such a challenge. . . . It nearly broke me.” “A Balrog. . . . Now I understand. . . . What an evil fortune! And I am already weary.”) Gandalf stopped on the Bridge of Khazad-dûm between his friends and the Balrog and challenged the creature, giving the Company time to escape. Even as he fell, Gandalf was telling them to escape, clearly thinking of them even in the face of imminent death. Clearly he knowingly risked and ultimately gave up his life to save them and their mission.

22. Paraphrases will differ slightly, but should be similar to “Whatever the consequences, we have to go the way that is open to us.” A simpler paraphrase might be “We have to do what we have to do.” Personal assessments will vary concerning whether the Company had a choice in its routes after all this. They were forced off Caradhras by the weather, they were attacked by Wargs and needed to find immediate protection from them, and the creature in the lake forced them into Moria and buried them within, so the strongest case can be made for the group really having little choice in their route.

23. Answers will vary. Good arguments may be made for both positions. Accept well-reasoned responses.

BOOK II, Chapters 6–10

Vocabulary:

1. g; 2. e; 3. d; 4. i; 5. h; 6. j; 7. c; 8. a; 9. b; 10. f

Questions:

1. They believe that Gollum was somewhere in Moria and picked up their trail as they were going through. They fear that he is following them, drawn by the Ring.
2. Only Boromir seemed feel the need to tell anyone what his decision had been: “It need not be said that I refused to listen. The Men of Minas Tirith are true to their word.” Gimli said that it seemed “my choice would remain secret and