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Jesus and Harry Potter: Disarming the Powers

On July 21, 2007 millions of people camped out at bookstores around the world. Men and women, children and adults, people from all imaginable ethnic and religious backgrounds: all wanted to be among the first to hold in their hand a copy of J.K. Rowling's final novel detailing the life and adventures of the boy-wizard, Harry Potter. For ten years, millions of readers followed Harry's story as he discovered his magical powers and found himself in a life-and-death struggle with the most evil wizard of all time, Lord Voldemort. How would it all end? Would Harry emerge alive and victorious after a grand duel, or would he sacrifice his own life to save the magical world? The debate raged. While the topic of the debate was a fantasy story, the real question boiled down to "How does one defeat evil? Does one over-power evil with more power? Or does one over-come evil with something very different?"

Our world's default response to evil is to try to over-power it. We turn to this default response when we hurt someone who hurts us. We turn to this default response when we join cliques and gangs that protect us from the evils of outsiders. We turn to this default response when we ignore the cruelty and bullying that happens in our schools. How do we defeat evil? Through the power of violence, the power of exclusion, and the power of silence.

Do you notice how all of these responses to evil assume that the source of evil exists outside of us? Do you notice how all of these responses are rooted in fear: fear of vulnerability, fear of pain, fear of difference, even the fear of death? These are the fears that also motivate the worst villains. In his quest to defeat death, Voldemort engaged in a series of murders, ripped his soul into seven pieces, and hid these pieces in objects in a grand life insurance scheme. Harry and his two loyal friends set out to destroy these shreds of Voldemort's soul. But in the end, Harry comes to the life-shattering conclusion that one of these twisted bits of soul has lodged itself inside his own. Could it be that the villain lives inside of us as well?

What now? Harry could have kept fighting. He could have stayed with his friends who were resisting Voldemort and his minions with wands, spells, and curses. But Harry knew that Voldemort could not be defeated unless every vessel carrying an evil soul fragment was destroyed. That meant Harry. Harry had to die. If he wanted to save the people he loved from the evil of Voldemort, he had to walk alone into the forest and let Voldemort kill him.

Now, in JK Rowling's story, Harry alone possessed one of Voldemort's evil soul fragments. But what if we all carry around this sort of evil? What if our fears, our little pieces of selfishness, meanness, and our efforts to always be one-up from the person next to us build upon each other and create evil systems and powers beyond our control? How then, do we eradicate evil? Must we all walk calmly to our death as Harry did?

Here comes the good news. We don't. The man named Jesus, through whom God revealed his love for us, did what all of us together could never have done. Jesus absorbed all the mean, twisted soul fragments that reside in each of us and walked purposefully to his death on the cross. For all the world it looked as if the powers of evil had claimed one more victim. But in reality, when Jesus drew his final breath, it was not Jesus, but the evil he absorbed, that was

destroyed.

This is good news, but something about it feels hollow. For one thing, evil still exists in us and in our world. We're still fearful, jealous, angry, and manipulative. We continue to rip at our souls and rip at each other. If the story ends with Jesus' death, our cries of fear and sorrow continue to echo in our hearts, and we are left wondering if death still reigns supreme. This is why we need the resurrection.

Let us return to Harry whom we left surrendering himself to Voldemort in the forest. Voldemort attacks. He hurls the dreaded killing curse at Harry and strikes him down. The piece of Voldemort residing in Harry is destroyed. But if the story ended here, readers would be left wondering: Who will defeat the Voldemort that remains? What will happen to Harry's friends and schoolmates left grieving back at the castle? The job wouldn't be finished!

Thankfully, unbeknownst to Voldemort, a force more powerful than death is at work in Harry; that force is love. When Harry was a baby, his mother sacrificed herself to save him. Now, the sacrificial love of Harry's mother binds him to life. And Harry's willingness to sacrifice his life for his friends shields them from Voldemort's evil. When Voldemort and his minions return to the castle, they discover that their curses and spells no longer bind, maim, or kill. At the castle, Harry, very much alive, reveals himself to his friends and confronts Voldemort for a final showdown. But this isn't to be a showdown popping with powerful magic and fancy wizardry. Harry knows the battle was already won deep in the forest. All Voldemort's final defeat required was a simple disarming charm: *Expelliarmus!* Readers who wondered how evil could be defeated can close the book with an answer: evil is defeated through self-sacrificing love.

Could it be that the crowds that clogged bookstores on that day three years ago were hungry for more than a story about the magical romps of wand-waving teenagers. In a world in which it seems the inevitable response to evil is more violence, more cruelty, more retribution, and more walls of silence, could it be that these crowds were hungry for a different story? Harry may be a story of fiction. But another story of loving self-sacrifice and disarming victory is available in the true story of Jesus Christ. In his great love for us, Jesus absorbs the ugly shreds of our fearful souls and takes them to his death on the cross. Through the power of his loving sacrifice, Jesus emerges from death to proclaim victory over the powers of evil, sin, and death. Are we willing to give Jesus our fears? Are we willing to give Jesus our fears of being beaten down, excluded, noticed, or ignored? When we give Jesus these fearful shreds of our soul, we are freed to respond to evil with true heroism. We are freed to confront the evil we see in our schools and in our world, freed to speak up when someone else is being bullied or abused, freed to step outside of our walls to include others, freed to disarm evil with the power of love. When we release our fears to Jesus, all these sorts of things are possible. So I invite you to join this story of heroic courage. Let go of the fears that cling to your soul and join Jesus in his mission to disarm the evil that lingers in our world. *Expelliarmus!*