

CHARLES  
DICKENS'

A  
Christmas  
Carol

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*With a Four-Week Bible Study for Advent*

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*by Travis J. Scholl*



# INTRODUCTION

Ever since its first publication in 1843, Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* has been a holiday classic. The legendary story of the transformation of Ebenezer Scrooge...from "Bah-humbug!" to "God bless us, every one!"...is as much a part of Christmas as mistletoe and Santa Claus. Dickens originally wrote *A Christmas Carol* to revive the joyful traditions of Christmas and the celebration of the yuletide, since Cromwell's Puritan revolution in England had prohibited any rites or practices deemed "pagan." *A Christmas Carol* nearly single-handedly rejuvenated those traditions in Victorian England.

Yet, the story of the redemption of Ebenezer Scrooge is also a meaningful story for people of faith. And a wonderful story to study as part of the Advent journey to the manger outside Bethlehem. As a result, we present here in one volume the original text of Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* complemented by a four-part discussion guide for Christian individuals or groups. You will notice that each part of the study follows immediately after the section (or in Dickens' terms, "stave," a synonym for "stanza," in keeping with the carol/song metaphor) to be read for that week. Some of the themes that we have found within the story that make it an interesting study for Advent and Christmas include hope, redemption, transformation, the work of the Spirit, and the Christian life. You will find explorations of those themes intertwined throughout the story and the guide.

It would be advantageous, though not essential, to select a leader to help prepare for each week's session and to help guide discussions and activities. The Bible study component of each section is based on a "Scrooge from Scripture," to identify spiritual themes that you can use for meditation and discussion. Discussion

prompts and activities provide depth to the study, combining an understanding of the literary background of *A Christmas Carol* with applications for our daily living as Christians. And in keeping with the spirit of the story and the season, each section includes a well-known Christmas carol that can be sung by the group. Finally, each week's study is undergirded by a time for prayer.

The discussion guide is structured to be highly flexible. Feel free to adapt the study to the distinct personality of your own group. Some of the ideas will work for your group better than others, so use what works and leave behind what doesn't.

As with all studies of this kind, it works best when the group comes prepared. We have left room on the pages for you to mark up the book with notes and observations. Also, consider checking out *The Annotated Christmas Carol*, edited by Michael Patrick Hearn (published by W.W. Norton). It is a tremendous resource that illuminates the historical and literary backgrounds of the story. You should have no trouble finding it at your local library or bookstore.

Finally, a word of thanks is in order to Rev. Dan Lozer. His ideas and enthusiasm for *A Christmas Carol* played a significant part in inspiring this book, over a decade after his first inquiry to us.

We pray God's blessings upon your reading, study, and conversation, as you listen for the notes of hope that ring true in the Word made flesh for us all.

Travis J. Scholl  
July, 2004



# A CHRISTMAS CAROL

In Prose

Being A Ghost Story of Christmas

by

Charles Dickens

## Preface

I have endeavoured in this Ghostly little book, to raise the Ghost of an Idea, which shall not put my readers out of humour with themselves, with each other, with the season, or with me. May it haunt their house pleasantly, and no one wish to lay it.

Their faithful Friend  
and Servant,  
C.D.

December 1843.

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# SESSION 1

## WHO AM I?

### Ice Breaker

The story of *A Christmas Carol* has become an icon within the culture of Christmas. Yet, prior to its publication in 1843, Christmas had become a solemn holiday, closer to Good Friday than to the Christmas we celebrate today. *A Christmas Carol* almost single-handedly revived the joyful yuletide celebration of Christmas. Begin today's session by sharing stories of your own favorite Christmas traditions.

### Opening Prayer

Stir up your power, O Lord, and come. Surround us with your presence, so that in seeing you, we may discover who we truly are. Amen.

## A Scrooge from Scripture: David

- Read Psalms 51 and 139.

We certainly don't think of David's life as Scrooge-like. But one episode of his life certainly was. The story of David, Bathsheba, Uriah, and the prophet Nathan resonates with the same basic confrontation that is at the center of *A Christmas Carol*. Nathan's visitation to King David to confront him with his sin is the same confrontation that Scrooge faces. David's response is the anguished confession of Psalm 51—"Indeed, I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me" (51:5). Yet, we see in David the tension between the fact that we are born in sin and the reality that we are created by God. Contrast Psalm 51:5 with Psalm 139:13-14—"... you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made." The German Theologian Martin Luther characterized this tension in the life of the redeemed child of God with the Latin phrase *simul justus et peccator*, simultaneously sinner and saint. So when we ask ourselves, "Who am I?" we answer knowing that we are created by God yet shackled by sin, just like Marley, Scrooge, and the ghosts hovering outside his window. We answer the question knowing that we are people awaiting the birth of a Savior.

## A Christmas Carol: “God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen”

The caroler who comes to Scrooge’s door doesn’t get two lines into this carol before he is frightened away by Scrooge. The carol is an announcement of both the birth of the Savior and the peace and fellowship that Christ came to bring.

God rest ye merry, gentlemen,  
Let nothing you dismay,  
Remember Christ our Savior  
Was born on Christmas Day;  
To save us all from Satan’s power  
When we were gone astray.  
O tidings of comfort and joy, comfort and joy;  
O tidings of comfort and joy

In Bethlehem, in Israel,  
This blessed Babe was born,  
And laid within a manger  
Upon this blessed morn;  
The which His mother Mary  
Did nothing take in scorn.  
O tidings of comfort and joy, comfort and joy;  
O tidings of comfort and joy

Now to the Lord sing praises  
All you within this place,  
And with true love and brotherhood  
Each other now embrace;  
This holy tide of Christmas  
All others doth deface.  
O tidings of comfort and joy, comfort and joy;  
O tidings of comfort and joy

Text and tune: Traditional English



## Summary of Stave One

*A Christmas Carol* begins with the plain and simple fact that Scrooge's business partner, Joseph Marley, was dead. But the action starts with Scrooge in his counting-house office with his clerk on Christmas Eve, where he is visited by his nephew, a Christmas caroler, and two philanthropic gentlemen seeking Christmas generosity. All are turned away by Scrooge with his characteristic "Humbug!" At the end of the day, Scrooge goes home only to be haunted by ominous signs of the dead Marley. After locking himself into his bedroom, Scrooge is visited by Marley's ghost, bound in heavy chains. After a long conversation, Marley reveals to Scrooge that he will be visited by three spirits, who will offer Scrooge the chance to escape his fate. After Marley departs through the window to join the crowd of ghosts who share the same bondage to misery and regret, Scrooge falls fast asleep on his bed, exhausted.

## Book Discussion Prompts

1. The narrator is quick to point out that Scrooge and the long-dead Marley have interchangeable personalities: “Sometimes people new to the business called Scrooge Scrooge, and sometimes Marley, but he answered to both names: it was all the same to him” (pp.6-7). What does this say about Scrooge’s own dead identity?
2. St. Paul points out the ultimate result of sin: “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). And Paul recognized that this death is not only physical but spiritual. How does Scrooge’s state of “sin” result in dead living?
3. Read aloud the paragraph that begins, “Oh! but he was a tight-fisted hand at the grindstone, Scrooge!...” (p. 7). Dickens has given us a most colorful description of every human’s state as a sinner. Sin turns us inward, makes us cold, shrivels up our personality. How does sin change how we view ourselves? ...how we view others? ...how others view us?
4. What does Scrooge’s conversation with his nephew reveal about Scrooge’s attitude toward the world? Do you see similar attitudes in your own life, or in the world or people around you?
5. Right before Marley appears in Scrooge’s bedroom, the narrator directs our attention to the fireplace, which is illustrated with characters from Scripture. The narrator points out that Marley’s face “came like the ancient Prophet’s rod” (p.16). How is Marley’s visitation prophetic? What are the parallels to prophetic confrontation we find in Scripture, like Nathan’s visitation with David?

6. The chains that bind Marley are symbols of the sins that bound him in life—"I wear the chain I forged in life...I made it link by link, and yard by yard" (pp.19-20). Thus Marley asks Scrooge, "Or would you know...the weight and length of the strong coil you bear yourself?" (p. 20) What spiritual chains are you bearing this Advent season?
7. Marley alludes to "that blessed Star which led the Wise Men to a poor abode" (p.21) Where might the Christmas Star be leading you this Advent?
8. Marley informs Scrooge that the visitation of the three spirits will occur over three nights. Is there any meaning we can draw from the foretelling that Scrooge's experience will take three days?
9. When Scrooge goes to the window, he sees Marley join a host of ghosts, all of them bound in chains of REGRET—"the misery of them all was, clearly, that they sought to interfere, for good, in human matters, and had lost the power for ever" (p. 23). What regrets have you faced in your past? How do you deal with those regrets?
10. There is hope when Marley reveals his purpose in visiting Scrooge: "I am here tonight to warn you, that you have yet a chance and hope of escaping my fate" (p. 21). Where do we find our hope?

## Activity

Charles Dickens was well-known for the colorful and witty names he gave his characters, not the least of which is Ebenezer Scrooge. It is uncanny how the name seems to perfectly embody the character's personality. Take some time prior to this week's session to think about the failures and struggles you have faced in the past week—the things you've done and left undone. Then, come up with a name for yourself, like "Thaddeus Neighborenvyn" or "Frowny Furrowbrow." Share your name and, to the extent you are comfortable, your struggle with the group. Of course, this is not to make light of sin, but to open up an opportunity to honestly share with one another the struggles you are currently experiencing.

YOUR NAME:

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After everyone has shared, turn to the person on your right and left and say to each, "In Christ, you are forgiven, Mr./Ms. (Name)."

## Closing Prayer

The group may join hands and contribute parts to a joint prayer. A leader or the first person to pray may repeat some of the concerns mentioned in the discussion, including personal/family needs. (The prayer may conclude with these words based on Psalm 118:1.)

O Lord, you have searched us and know us better than we know ourselves. And yet, we give you thanks for you are good and your steadfast love endures forever, cleansing our heart and renewing our spirit, all through your Son, Jesus Christ, in whom we pray. Amen.

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