



A  
Christmas  
Carol  
SPECIAL EDITION



The Charles Dickens Classic

————— *with* —————

Christian Insights & Discussion  
Questions *for* Groups & Families  
*by* Stephen Skelton

**Standard**<sup>®</sup>  
PUBLISHING  
*Bringing The Word to Life*

Cincinnati, Ohio

# CONTENTS

Introduction.....	4
Preface.....	6
STAVE ONE: Marley's Ghost.....	7
DISCUSSION ONE: Selfishness.....	30
STAVE TWO: The First of the Three Spirits.....	34
DISCUSSION TWO: Regret.....	55
STAVE THREE: The Second of the Three Spirits.....	59
DISCUSSION THREE: Repentance.....	86
STAVE FOUR: The Last of the Spirits.....	91
DISCUSSION FOUR: Salvation.....	109
STAVE FIVE: The End of It.....	113
DISCUSSION FIVE: Rebirth.....	121
Resources.....	125
Bibliography.....	127

# A Christmas Carol<sup>[1]</sup>

## STAVE ONE<sup>[2]</sup>

# Marley's Ghost

Marley was dead: to begin with. There is no doubt whatever about that. The register of his burial was signed by the clergyman, the clerk, the undertaker, and the chief mourner. Scrooge<sup>[3]</sup> signed it: and Scrooge's name was good upon 'Change,<sup>[4]</sup> for anything he chose to put his hand to. Old Marley was as dead as a door-nail.

Mind! I don't mean to say that I know, of my own knowledge, what there is particularly dead about a door-nail. I might have been inclined, myself, to regard a coffin-nail as the deadest piece of ironmongery in the trade. But the wisdom of our ancestors is in the simile; and my unhallowed hands shall not disturb it, or the Country's done for. You will therefore permit me to repeat, emphatically, that Marley was as dead as a door-nail.

Scrooge knew he was dead? Of course he did. How could it be otherwise? Scrooge and he were partners for I don't know how many years. Scrooge was his sole executor, his sole administrator, his sole assign, his sole residuary legatee, his sole friend and sole mourner. And even Scrooge was not so dreadfully cut up by the

[1] While today we may use the term *carol* to refer to any Christmastime song, including secular ones such as "Jingle Bells," Dickens is using the meaning of carol familiar to him: a song celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ.

[2] Dickens extends the concept of his book being a carol by calling each chapter a *stave*, a stanza of a song.

[3] The colloquial word *scrooge* means "to squeeze" and is used by Dickens to underscore his main character's primary sin: greed—as in the description of Scrooge as "a squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous, old sinner!"

[4] His name was "good upon 'Change." This refers to the Royal Exchange, the center of commerce for the City of London. The phrase means Scrooge had good credit, he could be trusted financially.

sad event, but that he was an excellent man of business on the very day of the funeral, and solemnised it with an undoubted bargain.

The mention of Marley's funeral brings me back to the point I started from. There is no doubt that Marley was dead. [5] This must be distinctly understood, or nothing wonderful can come of the story I am going to relate. If we were not perfectly convinced that Hamlet's Father [6] died before the play began, there would be nothing more remarkable in his taking a stroll at night, in an easterly wind, upon his own ramparts, than there would be in any other middle-aged gentleman rashly turning out after dark in a breezy spot—say Saint Paul's Churchyard [7] for instance—literally to astonish his son's weak mind.

Scrooge never painted out Old Marley's name. There it stood, years afterwards, above the warehouse door: Scrooge and Marley. The firm was known as Scrooge and Marley. 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.

Oh! But he was a tight-fisted hand at the grindstone, Scrooge! a squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous, old sinner! [8] Hard and sharp as flint, from which no steel had ever struck out generous fire; secret, and self-contained, and solitary as an oyster. The cold within him froze his old features, nipped his pointed nose, shrivelled his cheek, stiffened his gait; made his eyes red, his thin lips blue; and spoke out shrewdly in his grating voice. A frosty rime [9] was on his head, and on his eyebrows, and his wiry chin. He carried his own low temperature always about with him; he iced his office in the dog-days; and didn't thaw it one degree at Christmas.

[5] This is the fourth time in the first four paragraphs that Dickens states Marley is dead. The repetition serves to highlight the death from which Marley makes his miraculous reappearance.

[6] Another bit of foreshadowing—Dickens here refers to the well-known literary figure of the ghost of Hamlet's father, who appears three times in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

[7] Dickens was fond of writing about the London landmark Saint Paul's Cathedral, featuring it in many of his works, including *David Copperfield* in which David takes Peggotty to the roof.

[8] Dickens's use of "sinner" reflects the Christian context of his story. You cannot have sin without God to decree sin. Men deal with crime and criminals. God deals with sin and sinners.

[9] *Rime* as used here is a cold mist or fog. The "frosty rime" on Scrooge's head is a description of his grey or white hair.

External heat and cold had little influence on Scrooge. No warmth could warm, nor wintry weather chill him. No wind that blew was bitterer than he, no falling snow was more intent upon its purpose, no pelting rain less open to entreaty. Foul weather didn't know where to have him. The heaviest rain, and snow, and hail, and sleet, could boast of the advantage over him in only one respect. They often "came down" handsomely, and Scrooge never did. [10]

Nobody ever stopped him in the street to say, with gladsome looks, "My dear Scrooge, how are you? When will you come to see me?" No beggars implored him to bestow a trifle, no children asked him what it was o'clock, no man or woman ever once in all his life inquired the way to such and such a place, of Scrooge. Even the blindmen's dogs appeared to know him; and when they saw him coming on, would tug their owners into doorways and up courts; and then would wag their tails as though they said, "No eye at all is better than an evil eye, [11] dark master!"

But what did Scrooge care? It was the very thing he liked. To edge his way along the crowded paths of life, warning all human sympathy to keep its distance, was what the knowing ones call "nuts" [12] to Scrooge.

Once upon a time—of all the good days in the year, on Christmas Eve—old Scrooge sat busy in his counting-house. It was cold, bleak, biting weather: foggy withal: and he could hear the people in the court outside go wheezing up and down, beating their hands upon their breasts, and stamping their feet upon the pavement-stones to warm them. The city clocks had only just gone three, but it was quite dark already: it had not been light all day: and candles were flaring in the windows of the neighbouring offices,

[10] Dickens makes a cutting pun with the phrase "came down." When weather "came down," it fell heavily. But the phrase was also used as a slang term to refer to people laying out money, as to give to the poor. When men "came down," they gave generously. But "Scrooge never did."

[11] The superstition of the "evil eye" holds that a person can harm others with a look. In Stave Two, Dickens appropriates this superstitious idea to make a moral point: "There was an eager, greedy, restless motion in the eye, which showed the passion [Gain] that had taken root, and where the shadow of the growing tree would fall."

[12] We often use the word *nuts* today as an expression when something goes wrong, or to refer to someone being crazy. But here the word is used in an older form, suggesting something that created enthusiasm, or meaning favorable or of good fortune, good luck.

like ruddy smears upon the palpable brown air. The fog came pouring in at every chink and key-hole, and was so dense without, that although the court was of the narrowest, the houses opposite were mere phantoms. To see the dingy cloud come drooping down, obscuring everything, one might have thought that Nature lived hard by, and was brewing on a large scale.

The door of Scrooge's counting-house was open that he might keep his eye upon his clerk, who in a dismal little cell beyond, a sort of tank, was copying letters. Scrooge had a very small fire, but the clerk's fire was so very much smaller that it looked like one coal. But he couldn't replenish it, for Scrooge kept the coal-box in his own room; and so surely as the clerk came in with the shovel, the master predicted that it would be necessary for them to part. Wherefore the clerk put on his white comforter, <sup>[13]</sup> and tried to warm himself at the candle; in which effort, not being a man of a strong imagination, he failed.

"A merry Christmas, uncle! God save you!" <sup>[14]</sup> cried a cheerful voice. It was the voice of Scrooge's nephew, who came upon him so quickly that this was the first intimation he had of his approach.

"Bah!" said Scrooge, "Humbug!" <sup>[15]</sup>

He had so heated himself with rapid walking in the fog and frost, this nephew of Scrooge's, <sup>[16]</sup> that he was all in a glow; his face was ruddy and handsome; his eyes sparkled, and his breath smoked again.

"Christmas a humbug, uncle!" said Scrooge's nephew. "You don't mean that, I am sure."

"I do," said Scrooge. "Merry Christmas! What right have you to be merry? What reason have you to be merry? You're poor enough."

[13] The clerk's "comforter" is his long knit scarf.

[14] Ironically, when the book was performed as a play, this line, "God save you," as well as the more famous line, "God bless us every one," could not be spoken on the London stage, so cautious was the Lord Chamberlain's examiner of plays who checked scripts for blasphemy.

[15] Scrooge's now famous interjection was a common term for nonsense. It seems a familiar response of his in this first stave. However, this will be the last chapter in which we hear him utter it, and by the end of Stave One he can't even finish the word, indicating change already beginning to occur in his perceptions.

[16] Charles Kent, a friend of Dickens, commented, "this description of Scrooge's Nephew was, quite unconsciously but most accurately, in every word of it, a literal description of [Charles Dickens] himself" (*Charles Dickens as a Reader*, 1872).

# Selfishness

**A**bout these studies: The discussion material has been designed for use with readers across a range of ages. Though all of the questions are suitable for use with adults, we would suggest that the A. and B. questions would be more appropriate for younger readers.

## I. TELLING THE STORY

Stave One introduces Ebenezer Scrooge—a man so self-centered, not even Christmastime can put him in a giving mood. In this discussion we'll examine how selfishness is really our attempt to control our own lives, rather than allow God to lead us. We'll see how selfishness can cut us off from others, putting us in prisons of our own making. We'll also witness the freedom that selflessness can bring. And we'll discover what Jacob Marley laments: that selfishness can not only cheat people out of enjoying an abundant life on earth, but it can also rob them of the greatest treasure anyone could ever have—eternal life with God.

### Key Verse

*“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit,  
but in humility consider others better than yourselves.”*

—PHILIPPIANS 2:3



How did Scrooge show his selfishness in the way he acted toward his clerk? toward his nephew? toward the two gentlemen?

- B** When his nephew wished Scrooge “A merry Christmas!” Ebenezer replied with “Bah! Humbug!” In other words, he was calling Christmas a bunch of nonsense. Considering what was said in the story, why does Scrooge think Christmas is nonsense? For what other reasons would you think Scrooge might not want to celebrate the birth of Christ?
- C** What connections do you see between Scrooge’s material, emotional, and spiritual selfishness? How do you see each of these impacting Scrooge’s life in Stave One?
- D** Jacob Marley tells Scrooge that “no space of regret can make amends for one life’s opportunities misused.” What opportunities did Marley misuse? What opportunities do we see Scrooge misuse due to his selfishness?

## II. TELLING YOUR STORY

If it wasn’t for acting selfish, some of us wouldn’t know how to act. Like little Scrooges, selfish people seem to think, “If I don’t get it for myself, how else will I get what I want before someone else gets it?” However, we should think about what we are giving away while we are trying so hard to grab things. Instead of filling our lives up with stuff, we should be willing to give our very lives for the sake of Christ. In an amazing way, when we give our lives to God, and let go of our control, we gain more satisfaction and security than we could ever imagine.

### Key Verse

*“What good is it for a man to gain the whole world,  
yet forfeit his soul?”*

—MARK 8:36

- A** Describe a time when you were selfish. What happened? How did you feel about yourself at the time?

**B** We often think of *generosity* just meaning being willing to give money or things away. But the word *generous* also can be used to talk about someone being kind even when he or she is being treated unkindly. We see examples of generous spirits in the characters of the clerk (Bob Cratchit) and Scrooge's nephew. Describe a time when you were generous. How did people react to your generosity? What effect did being generous have on you?

**C** Have you or has anyone you know ever suffered because of someone else's selfishness? How was that handled? What have you sacrificed for your own selfishness?

**D** Compare the actions and attitudes of Scrooge's nephew and his clerk with those of Scrooge himself. For example, look at the two paragraphs that describe the clerk and Scrooge leaving after the day of work is done. How were the nephew and the clerk richer than the old miser? How were they more free?

### III. TELLING THE STORY OF CHRISTMAS

“The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned. . . . For to us a child is born, to us a son is given” (Isaiah 9:2, 6). God completed the ultimate act of selflessness by giving us his Son to bring light to our dark world, to save us from our sins. To celebrate and show our gratitude for this gift, we should act in love toward others just as God has acted in love toward us.

#### Key Verse

*“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other,  
just as in Christ God forgave you.”*

—EPHESIANS 4:32



**A.** What's the best gift you have ever received for Christmas? What made it special?

**B.** How can you share the gift of Christ? Why is it important to do this?

**C.** Scrooge was given the gift of the appearance of Marley on Christmas Eve. Marley said he had come to warn Scrooge, that he might have "a chance and hope" of escaping Marley's fate. Why do you think a character such as Marley would have wanted to give Scrooge this chance?

**D.** If your selfishness has separated you from others in your life, what can you do to repair these broken bonds? What practical things can you do to show others what Christmas means to you?

## IV. LIVING THE STORY

Selfishness can destroy relationships: with your family, with your friends, with your God. Acting in humility and generosity can build relationships. In being humble, you seek to meet the needs of others before your own. In being generous, you seek to give more than you get.

Ask God to help you live with less selfishness and more generosity by:

- ◆ Showing love to someone—even when you don't feel like it.
- ◆ Giving of your money or time—even when it is not convenient.
- ◆ Praying for someone—even when they have mistreated you.

### For Further Study

Psalm 119:36

Proverbs 11:17; 18:1

Luke 12:15, 20, 21

Romans 2:7, 8

Ephesians 5:5, 21

James 3:13-17