



52

LITTLE LESSONS

from

A Christmas Carol

BOB WELCH

A PDF COMPANION TO THE AUDIOBOOK

52 Little Lessons from A Christmas Carol

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LESSON 1



Context Clarifies a Story

When you think of *A Christmas Carol*, what comes to mind? The book or one of its many film adaptations? What is your favorite part of the story and why?

A perennial holiday favorite, Dickens's novel is nearly 180 years old. What do you think are the reasons for its longevity?

LESSON 2



Growing Wiser Means Getting Uncomfortable

The word *haunt* doesn't have to mean something scary. It can mean "to visit frequently." Who are the people (and places) that leave your heart "pleasantly haunted"? Take a brief moment to thank God for placing them in your life.

Discomfort often leads to wisdom. Think of a time in your life when you had to undergo something painful or uncomfortable. How were you wiser or more mature afterward?

LESSON 3



It's Not About You

Dickens describes Ebenezer Scrooge as “solitary as an oyster.” Considering that not-so-appealing oysters can be the source of something exquisite—pearls—how did Scrooge’s frightening experience bring about something unexpected and beautiful?

Read Proverbs 1:7. Why does turning our backs on wisdom and instruction make us foolish? Did you ever make this choice in your own life? What did you learn?

LESSON 4



Misery Loves Company

Why does pessimism often attract more company than optimism?
How does sharing our misery with others prevent us from making
needed changes in our lives?

Have you ever excluded or looked down on someone for not fitting
in or being part of your circle of friends? How does it make you feel
in retrospect? What does Scripture reveal about this?

LESSON 5



Don't Let People Steal Your Joy

Fred and Cratchit's joy prevents Scrooge's harsh retorts from getting under their skin. Do you know someone who is perpetually negative? What tools has God given you to deal with their pessimistic outlook?

Have you ever had one of those days where the world's cynicism seems to rub off on you? Look up *joy* in a Bible concordance or online search engine. List here your favorite verses about joy to encourage your spirit this week.

LESSON 6



It's About More Than Christmas

The author refers to Christmas as “a prototype of idealism, the way life should *always* be.” What are some creative, meaningful ways to spread the joy of Christmastime throughout the year?

This chapter recounts the story of a remarkable cease-fire moment from World War I. This week, whom can you “climb out of the trenches for” and share the love of Christ with? What does that sharing look like?

LESSON 7



See Life as a Child

The Christmas season is an ideal time to celebrate the innocence and unbridled joy of children. How does seeing life as a child help us experience and cope with our daily struggles from a different perspective?

What are some ways you can play this week—with your own children or as a child—that can help open you up to Jesus' encouragement in Matthew 18:3?

LESSON 8



Everyone Has Value

Jesus radically upended human interaction when He told us not only to love our neighbors but also our enemies (Matthew 5:43–44). Who are the people in your life whom you consider enemies, or at least someone you would prefer to avoid? What are some ways you can extend an olive branch this week?

Read James 1:27. Why is looking after widows and orphans considered “pure and faultless” religion? How can acknowledging this help you purify your own faith?

LESSON 9



Business Isn't Life

How does the *business* (or busyness) of life get in the way of the *living* of life?

A strong work ethic is certainly an admirable quality, but how does workaholism prevent us from fulfilling the two greatest commandments to love God and to love our neighbors as ourselves (Matthew 22:36–39)?

LESSON 10



You Make the Chains That Shackle You

For an apparition, Marley's Ghost is quite self-aware, acknowledging that his eternal chains are self-inflicted, the result of ignoring the truth when he was living. What are some of the chains that shackle you, that prevent you from a deeper relationship with God?

Read Luke 6:46–49. Considering your relationships with friends and loved ones, why is having a strong foundation so important? Who is affected most when our foundation isn't as strong as it needs to be?

LESSON 11



Humility Enhances Vision

During the visit from the Ghost of Christmas Past, Scrooge begins to reveal the slightest indication of vulnerability. Why does acknowledging painful truths from our past make us so emotional? Is it regret or the opportunity for change that tugs at our heartstrings?

Jesus' compassion and humility provided the blueprint for how we should pattern our faith journey. Why are these two virtues so important in our walk with God?

LESSON 12



To Heal You Must Feel

Do you ever reprimand yourself for being too emotional, too “touchy-feely”? Why should we consider deep feelings to be badges of honor rather than things to be dismissed?

Many of us have a painful past that we are reluctant to revisit. What does Scripture tell us about the heartache we feel? Read Deuteronomy 31:8, Psalm 46:1–3, John 14:26–27, and Philipppians 4:6–7 for a good start.

LESSON 13



Your Actions Affect Others

We often don't realize what a difference we make in the lives of others. What are some ways, subtle or overt, to make others feel valued?

This chapter tells the story of Frances Slanger, posthumously honored for her contribution to the World War II effort. Who are some of the people who need to be honored and acknowledged for their contributions to your life?

LESSON 14



The Love of Money Costs You in the End

It's important to note that the Bible doesn't say *money* is "a root of all kinds of evil," but rather, the *love* of money is. What does this differentiation suggest when it comes to our relationship with finances?

Exodus 32 relates the story of Moses, Aaron, and the golden calf. What are some of the idols that even today's believers encounter on their faith journey? How does God help us when we get distracted?

LESSON 15



“Almost” Doesn’t Cut It

Sometimes it’s difficult to think of our walk with God as an adventure. What are some examples from Jesus’ ministry that suggest that faith can be adventurous and exciting?

Fear of failure is a common response to any undertaking that involves risk or sacrifice. How is failure a natural part of simply being human, and how does God help us when we fail or fall short of expectations?

LESSON 16



Life Is Best Lived When You're Awake

In today's hectic world, it's easy to forget to stop and simply be grateful. List some of the things you are thankful God has given you and offer up a brief prayer of gratitude for each one.

If life were a rushing river, would you rather be standing on the banks or on a raft moving with the current? What are the pros and cons of each scenario?

LESSON 17



Fear Has a Downside^{}*

Second Timothy 1:7 says that “God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind” (NKJV). Compare a time when you handled something out of fear versus a time when you responded with love. What did you learn from both situations?

Our life is comprised of a long string of choices, some good, some bad. If you could travel back in time, how would you change some of your not-so-great decisions?

LESSON 18



Showing Trumps Telling

What if you could come face-to-face with the old “you”? What kind of advice would you give your younger self?

Why is *showing* someone the truth often so much more effective than *telling* someone the truth?

LESSON 19



Learning Begins with Listening

It's one thing to hear what someone is saying, but to listen to them takes a lot more effort. What are some ways you can start listening more effectively to the people around you?

The Ghosts in *A Christmas Carol* are beginning to chip away at Scrooge's resistance. Why do we resist change so vigorously, and what are some ways to be more open to God's adjustments in our lives?

LESSON 20



Blessed Are the Poor

Read Zechariah 7:8–10. Why is looking after the “foreigner or the poor” such an integral part of following Christ? What does it suggest about the human tendency toward selfishness and pride?

What are some effective ways to help those in need within your community this holiday season?

LESSON 21



Attitude Is Everything

As the saying goes, money can't buy happiness. List some of the things in your life that money can't buy. Offer up a brief prayer of thanks for each one.

A good attitude can go a long way, even in the most challenging of circumstances. Think of a recent situation in which you could have had a better attitude, or one in which God helped you maintain a positive perspective. What did you learn?

LESSON 22



Talking the Talk Is Not Enough

The author repeats the familiar phrase “Love is a verb.” What exactly does this mean for you as you contemplate your own life?

Sometimes putting your faith into action is easier said than done. What are some small changes you can make to become a person who acts on faith rather than standing on the sidelines?

LESSON 23



The Past Can Be Empowering

Read the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11–31). Why do you think this story is so beloved among believers? What does it teach us about selfishness? About sin and pride? About forgiveness?

Miracles still happen. They may not be “big” miracles like walking on water or healing the blind, but they still make a big difference. Think of the small miracles that have happened in your life in the past two weeks. What ripple effect did they have, and how did they change you?

LESSON 24



Don't Return Evil for Evil

We've all heard "Two wrongs don't make a right." Forgiveness is a pillar of the Christian walk. What are the ramifications of unforgiveness, both in us and the person we choose not to forgive?

Read Matthew 5:38–39. Think of a time when you turned the other cheek or a situation where you chose not to. What did you learn from either situation?

LESSON 25



Bitterness Will Poison You

The high we get from getting back at someone typically is very short-lived, and we often are more bitter than before! Why is it better to leave vengeance to the Lord (Romans 12:19)?

Think of someone in your life who is struggling with bitterness. What are some gentle ways to model God's love toward them? Ask God for wisdom in helping them overcome their hurt.

LESSON 26



You Can't Wish Away the Uncomfortable

Are there people you view as inconveniences rather than opportunities? List them here and ask God to change the way you perceive them and to give you creative ways to minister to them.

Charles Dickens wrote *A Christmas Carol* from a nineteenth-century perspective, yet the social ills of Ignorance and Want are still with us today. How do they present themselves in our technologically advanced world?

LESSON 27



Fear Has an Upside

“It’s always darkest before the dawn” is a saying we’re all familiar with. What does this mean in the context of your daily walk with the Lord?

Why does Scrooge fear the Ghost of the Future more than the other Spectres? What about the future makes us fear it more than the past or the present?

LESSON 28



Letting Go Means Grabbing Hold

It's difficult to admit we don't have all the answers. What would your life look like if you had a magical way to get all the answers? How would that affect your reliance on God?

What are some things you need to let go of in your life? Ask God to help you release these things and reveal to you what to grab hold of instead.

LESSON 29



Your Life Matters More Than Your Death

This lesson discusses the concept of legacy. What does legacy mean to you, and how has legacy informed your faith journey?

The author discusses the praise of God versus the praise of our peers. What does he mean when he writes that “human praise is fickle”? What are some ways you can experience “praise from God” this week?

LESSON 30



Dying Lonely Is the Result of Living Lonely

Today's technology makes isolating ourselves very easy. What are some ways you have underestimated the value of connecting with others?

The author writes that "relationships are to love what airplanes are to flight." What can you do this week to give flight to past connections that have since been grounded and perhaps fallen by the wayside?

LESSON 31



Pain Is the Privilege of Losing Someone of Great Value

Although we may not deliberately search it out, pain is an inevitable part of the human experience. Consider the losses from your life, both small and significant. How did the Lord comfort you and what did you learn from those difficult times?

Read Isaiah 43:2, from more than one translation if possible. Why is water such a powerful metaphor in the Bible, and what does this passage reveal about pain and suffering?

LESSON 32



Death Is a Comma, Not a Period

For believers, death is merely a transition from one phase to the next. Knowing this, however, doesn't make the loss of a loved one any less profound. What does Scripture assure us about death? If it helps, use a Bible concordance or online search engine to look up *death* or *suffering*.

Is finding closure after a profound loss really possible? Why or why not?

LESSON 33



Amid Tragedy, Others Still Need You

Depending on the situation, sometimes you have to lead with your head, not your heart, and vice versa. Think of a time when you had to lead with your head, not your emotions. What did God reveal to you from this experience?

Who are the people who depend on you when times get tough? What have you learned from these relationships? Offer up a brief prayer of gratitude to God for putting these loved ones in your life.

LESSON 34



Your Truest Self Is Your Silent Self

Sometimes silence can be as effective as words spoken aloud.

Using Ecclesiastes 3:7–8 as a starting point, look up *silence* in a Bible concordance or an online search engine. What does Scripture reveal?

Scrooge recognizes from his encounter with the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come that he has been wasting his life on the wrong priorities. What are some of the priorities from your own life that you would like to change? Offer them up to the Lord and ask Him to illuminate the pathways to make that happen.

LESSON 35



Before Honor Comes Humility

A common belief is that people can't change, yet Christianity is all about the changing of hearts. Consider your favorite Bible characters and what they reveal about redemption and transformation.

As Scrooge encounters his own tombstone, he pleads for another opportunity to redeem himself. Have you ever been desperate for a second chance? Did you receive it? Why or why not? What did you learn?

LESSON 36



God Makes Good on His Promises

Have you ever been let down by a broken promise? How did it make you feel?

Romans 8:38–39 assures us that nothing separates us from God's love. How do God's promises differ from human promises? What are some efforts you can make to keep your own promises to others?

LESSON 37



Regret Leads to Renewal

What is the difference between regret and guilt when you place them within the context of your own life?

Have you ever had a relationship that got wounded? How did it get wounded and how did God help the wound to heal?

LESSON 38



Denial Prevents Change

Even Christians can manage to anesthetize themselves from the world's pain and heartache. What are ways you have put your guard up to protect yourself, and what has God given to believers to help them cope with life's difficulties?

Denial is a handy tool for avoiding hard truths. Contemplate a time you were in denial. What did you learn once you were able to confront the truth of the matter?

LESSON 39



Grace Changes Everything

Hebrews 4:16 mentions God's "throne of grace." The idea of an awe-inspiring throne room combined with the concept of undeserved favor paints a compelling juxtaposition of power and mercy. How does God use power and mercy in our lives to draw us closer to Him?

Think of a time you deserved punishment but received grace instead. What did God reveal to you from this experience?

LESSON 40



Let Your Heart Be Light

Read Genesis 21:1–6, the passage in which Sarah has a son in her old age and names him Isaac, which means “He laughs.” Why should we consider laughter a wonderful gift from God?

Who are some people in your life who could use a good laugh? Ask God for some creative ways to tickle their funny bone this week.

LESSON 41



There's Joy in Starting Over

The Christmas season tends to bring out the child in all of us, just as it did in the novel, when Scrooge gets a second chance at life. What are some of your favorite childhood memories of Christmastime?

Think back to the time when you were a “baby Christian” in your walk with God. How has your faith matured and evolved over time? Are there areas that still need maturing? Ask God to show you pathways to a deeper faith.

LESSON 42



You Must Be Present to Win

The author tells his writing students, “You cannot be a writer unless you notice.” Change one word in that sentence: “You cannot be a *Christian* unless you notice.” Why is noticing such an important part of our faith walk and how we interact with others?

The best thing about being in our comfort zone is the comfort, of course, but that doesn’t serve us or others very well. How does God use discomfort not only to change us but also the people we encounter in our daily lives?

LESSON 43



Give Because You've Been Given To

The turkey scene near the end of the novel is important because it shows that Scrooge has changed from within. What does the scene tell us about the need for action versus mere platitudes in our daily faith walk?

Love is much more than just a romantic feeling. It has many facets, including agape love, which is defined as “unselfish concern for the good of another.” What are some small yet meaningful ways you can express agape love to someone this week?

LESSON 44



Don't Give Expecting to Receive

Jesus encouraged anonymous generosity because he understood that giving unselfishly has the power to heal the giver as well as the recipient. What are some creative ways you can bless someone without bringing attention to yourself?

Read Matthew 6:5–8. Jesus essentially says in verse 7 that we should keep our prayerful words to a minimum because “your Father knows what you need before you ask him.” Write down five simple prayers you can offer up to the Lord this week. Try to keep each one at ten words or fewer.

LESSON 45



Giving Changes Your Perspective

Have you ever found yourself looking for the worst in people, in spite of what the Bible says about such pessimistic behavior? How and why does this outlook affect the pessimist worse than it does the object of derision?

Christmas is a wonderful time not only for being introspective about the past year but also for looking outside ourselves and discovering the God-given potential in others. Who needs uplifting in your life and how can you encourage them?

LESSON 46



Seeking Forgiveness Is a Sign of Strength

Why is forgiving someone who wronged you an act of strength, not weakness?

Social media has highlighted the phenomenon of the “humblebrag” in which someone draws attention to what would otherwise be considered an act of modesty, humility, or generosity. How does humblebragging undermine the act of forgiveness as we understand it in Scripture?

LESSON 47



It's Not About the Ghosts

Yes, it's important to live in the now, but life also includes the past and the future. How do the past and the future inform the way you lead your life in the present?

Read Exodus 3:14. When God said, "I AM WHO I AM," He essentially declared that He was not bound by time or space, that He was eternal. As His children, we, too, are eternal beings. How does this knowledge affect the way you see yourself? How you see others? How you live your faith?

LESSON 48



Life Is Best Lived Imaginatively

One has only to look at a platypus to understand that God has a vast imagination (and a pretty good sense of humor)! Why do you think God imbued his human creation with the gift of imagination?

Like muscles, tendons, and ligaments, our imaginations need to be stretched and exercised regularly. What are some ways you can tone up your imagination “muscles” this week?

LESSON 49



Redemption Is About Changed Hearts

The author defines *repentance* as “the necessary bridge between regret and salvation.” Think of a time when God led you to the bridge of repentance. What got you there in the first place and what did you learn from the situation?

Read Matthew 6:25–34, the well-known passage about “the birds of the air” and the “flowers of the field.” What does this scripture reveal about how we should respond to the temptation toward materialism and the need to accumulate “stuff”?

LESSON 50



Live with the End in Mind

Contemplating our own death may seem morbid, but as the author says, “the chance of each of us dying is 100 percent.” Looking back on the decisions you’ve made—in other words, your legacy—what would you change? What would you keep the same?

At some point, our entire life will be distilled down to a single punctuation mark—the dash between the years on our grave marker. What will your dash communicate to your loved ones? To your friends? To the world in general?

LESSON 51



It Is Never Too Late to Change

Being a believer is very much about discovering the joy of freedom that God gives us in abundance. What are some of the freedoms you've enjoyed since your faith journey began?

Do you know someone who has settled for a life of bitterness and self-pity? Though it may seem daunting, what truths can you speak to this person to help them not give up, see past their own misery, and embrace a life of joy and freedom? Ask God for the right words to say in gentleness and love.

LESSON 52



Be the Change You Want to See

Christmastime and *A Christmas Carol* undeniably go hand in hand. What are some other Yuletide-related things (movies, foods, books, songs, TV episodes) that you can't live without each year? What makes them special?

Of course, Christmas celebrates the birth of the One who gives each and every one of us the chance to experience life anew, just as Scrooge discovers for himself at the end of the novel. List five of your favorite Bible passages that bring to mind the true meaning of Christmas. Offer a brief prayer to the Lord for giving the gift of His Son.

Bibliography



Analyzing literature is like fixing a five-course meal for a dinner party: you immerse yourself in the possibilities, research what others have served in similar situations, and sample some dishes that might work. Then, between menu, ingredients, and execution, you imbue your unique stamp on the meal as a chef and present it to your guests, with hopes they will like it.

Or so I would assume, given that the only culinary offering I've concocted with more than two ingredients is a s'more—and that has only three.

My point: As writers, we blend what others have done before us with whatever uniqueness we can bring to the table. Thus, each of our offerings is, at the same time, completely *ours* and completely dependent on others, a hybrid of us and them. It is no different from the twenty-plus movie versions of *A Christmas Carol*: each based on

the same story but each with a style, tone, point of view, and cinematic essence all its own.

What I've tried to do is create nuggets of Bible-based wisdom gleaned from an 1843 book that's applicable to our lives today. The recipe might look like this: blend one Scrooge and four Ghosts, seasoned lightly with Christmas. Add one cup human kindness. Mix in New International Version Scripture. Garnish with a touch of humor, a dash of cold-hard reality, and a sprig of holly.

From whence did my ingredients come?

The first thing I did when immersing myself in this project was try to understand Charles Dickens the best I could—not so much as a writer, but as a human being, because who we are as writers ultimately goes back to who we are as people. I refamiliarized myself with books of his I'd read, such as *Great Expectations* and *A Tale of Two Cities*, and got to know ones I had not: *Oliver Twist* and *Nicholas Nickleby*, for example, which reminded me of his compassion and concern for the poor.

To fine-focus on Dickens as a person, I relied heavily on G. K. Chesterton's *Charles Dickens, the Last of the Great Men* (New York: The Press of the Readers Club, 1942). Chesterton's analysis comes from someone who was a great Dickens admirer, a great thinker, and a great philosopher on faith. Chesterton was born four years after Dickens died. In his book, he plumbs the Dickens waters at such depth that, at times, I confess, I struggled to follow him. But the book is punctuated with great wisdom and great wit, including

Chesterton's quote that "the pessimist can be enraged at evil. But only the optimistic can be surprised at it."

Gary L. Colledge's *God and Charles Dickens: Recovering the Christian Voice of a Classic Author* (Grand Rapids: BrazoPress, 2012) offers a more translucent view, particularly in terms of the author's spiritual essence. From a decidedly academic slant, the book twines what Dickens believed, spiritually, with what he wrote.

Dickens's own *The Life of Our Lord: Written for His Children During the Years 1846 to 1849* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1934) is a rare look at the man's spiritual scaffolding. These are the very words he chose to share with his children about the Jesus he knew and loved and, thus, helped me understand the faith-based underpinnings of *A Christmas Carol*.

Meanwhile, Jean A. Fischer's *A Charles Dickens Devotional* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2012) plies spiritually imbued life lessons from the spans of Dickens's work that I found helpful.

With amazing breadth and a wonderful sense of whimsy, Norrie Epstein's *The Friendly Dickens* (New York: Viking, 1998) helped me understand Dickens the man, Dickens the writer, and Dickens the legend. Epstein presents the author almost as if he were a pop star, which, in some ways, he was. And beyond analysis of *A Christmas Carol* and the author of it, Epstein offers wonderful bits of *Christmas Carol* trivia, not the least of which is that, for the 1938 movie, Lionel Barrymore was originally cast as Scrooge but gave way to Reginald Owen for health reasons. Scrooge and Old Man

Potter (*It's a Wonderful Life*, 1946): what a double billing that would have been!

Oswald Chambers's *My Utmost for His Highest* (Westwood, N.J.: Barbour and Company, Inc., 1963) was a great source for Bible-based wisdom, including His call for us, in lesson 15, to live with "reckless joy." Henri J. M. Nouwen's *The Only Necessary Thing: Living a Prayerful Life* (Chestnut Ridge, NY: Crossroad, 1999) gave breath to my lesson 46 quote, "Forgiveness is the name of love practiced among people who love poorly." And Andy Stanley's *Visioneering* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 1999) helped me understand faith in action in a way I'd never quite understood before. "Vision," he writes in what turned out to be prophetic regarding Scrooge's turnaround, "is a clear mental picture of what could be, fueled by the conviction that it *should be*."

In terms of understanding *A Christmas Carol*, Michael Patrick Hearn's *The Annotated Christmas Carol: A Christmas Carol in Prose* (New York, London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1976) is without equal. Not only does it go into mouthwatering depth on mince pies, death masks, and the roots of the name Cratchit, but the lengthy introduction is chock-full of nuances from, and reactions to, *A Christmas Carol*.

My quotes from *A Christmas Carol* are from *The Christmas Books: Volume I* (New York: Penguin, 1971), a reprinting of *A Christmas Carol* that was originally published in 1843.

Among other books I used for research: Grace Moore's *Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol* (St. Kilda, Victoria, Australia, 2011); Stephen

Skelton's *Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol: Special Church Edition* (Nashville, 2007); Hesketh Pearson's *Dickens: His Character, Comedy & Career* (New York: Harpers & Brothers, 1949); and Jane Smiley's *Charles Dickens* (New York: Viking, 2002).

Steve Marche's article on Facebook in the May 2012 issue of *The Atlantic* provided wonderful fodder for my argument that in real modern-day America or fictional nineteenth-century England, loneliness is loneliness.

For lesson 50, Tony Campolo's audio sermon "If I Had to Live It Over Again" (<https://soundcloud.com/tonycampolo/if-i-had-to-live-it-over-again>) enlightened me about perspective on life.

For weeks, our two-person household experienced a sort of "Christmas in July" movie festival, which included Henry Winkler in *An American Christmas Carol* (1979); Jim Carrey in Disney's *A Christmas Carol* (2009); *The Muppet Christmas Carol* (1992); Alastair Sim in *Scrooge: A Christmas Carol* (1951), perhaps the scariest of the bunch and including a wealth of imagined detail on Ebenezer's past; and *A Christmas Carol* (1938) starring Reginald Owen.

Laugh if you will at the kid comedies in that bunch, but remember what the narrator—a.k.a. Charles Dickens—of *A Christmas Carol* told us: "I should have liked, I do confess, to have had the lightest license of a child, and yet been man enough to know its value."