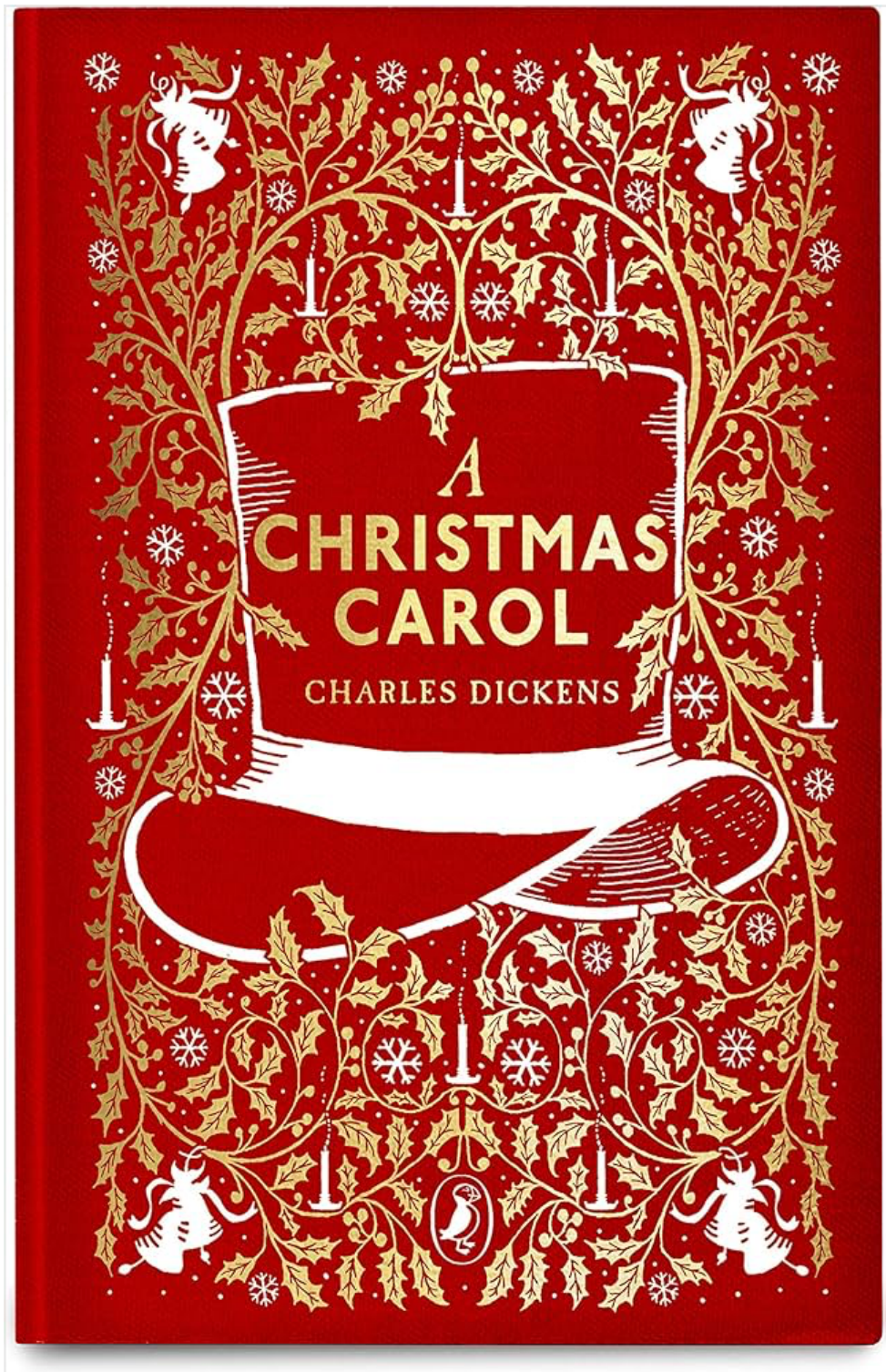


## A Christmas Carol (1843) - Charles Dickens



### About Charles Dickens

Lived 1812-1870 and was a towering figure of the Victorian era, a prolific English novelist, journalist, and social critic celebrated for creating unforgettable characters and exposing societal injustices in works like *Oliver Twist*, *Great Expectations*, and *A Christmas Carol*. Despite a childhood marred by poverty and forced labor, he rose to immense fame, becoming a master storyteller who used serialized novels, public readings, and sharp social

commentary to champion the poor and influence public opinion and law. His enduring legacy includes iconic tales and a language enriched by his popular phrases.

## Book Overview

Ebenezer Scrooge is a mean, miserable, bitter old man with no friends. One cold Christmas Eve, three ghosts take him on a scary journey to show him the error of his nasty ways. By visiting his past, present and future, Scrooge learns to love Christmas and the people all around him.

*What follows are quotes from the book above. These quotes stood out to psychotherapist Emil Barna in his reading of the book in December 2025. They are not meant to be exhaustive nor representative of the entire book. All quotes are to be read in this context and must not replace medical and/or other professional advice. Note: Any typographical errors occurred through the transcription process and do not reflect what may be found in the book. Note also: Beneath various quotations from the book, I may have added my own comments/things. These will always be in bold italics. Further, where I have made bold text from the quotations below, it's to emphasise a point. My emphasis does not appear in the original text. Note, finally: This is a Christian book, and I am a Christian and psychotherapist, therefore I have endeavoured to highlight both Christian and psychological themes and given my thoughts thereof.*

## 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."

*What a beautiful sentiment—to haunt one's house ... pleasantly. The idea behind this Carol is one many miss: that of transformation. One begins by calling themselves a Grinch or Scrooge or something like it, yet doesn't end with what they did to change that. If a Grinch or Scrooge can change, why not you?*

## Stave One: Marley's Ghost

"Oh! but he was a tight-fisted hand at the grindstone, Scrooge! a squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous old sinner! 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 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."

"'There are many things from which I might have derived good, by which I have not profited, I dare say'"

"have always thought of Christmas time, when it has come round - apart from the veneration due to its sacred name and origin, **if anything belonging to it can be apart from that** - as a good time: a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time: the only time I know of, in the long calendar of the year, when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut-up hearts freely, and to think of people below them as if they really were fellow-passengers to the grave, and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys."

"'It's not my business, Scrooge returned. **'It's enough for a man to understand his own business, and not to interfere with other people's. Mine occupies me constantly.'**"

"To say that he was not startled, or that his blood was not conscious of a terrible sensation to which it had been a stranger from infancy, would be untrue. But he put his hand upon the key he had relinquished, turned it, unlocked the door, walked in, and lighted his candle."

"Up Scrooge went, not caring a button for that: **darkness is cheap, and Scrooge liked it.** But before he shut his heavy door, he walked through his rooms to see that all was right."

***But the faintest light overpowers the darkest night...***

"Scrooge was not much in the habit of cracking jokes, nor did he feel, in his heart, by any means waggish then. The truth is, that he tried to be smart, as a means of distracting his own attention, and keeping down his terror; for the spectre's voice disturbed the very marrow in his bones."

"But why do spirits walk the earth, and why do they come to me? **'It is required of every man,' the Ghost returned, 'that the spirit within him should walk abroad among his fellow-men, and travel far and wide; and if that spirit goes not forth in life, it is condemned to do so after death.** It is doomed to wander through the world - oh, woe is me! - and witness what it cannot share, but might have shared on earth, and turned to happiness!'"

"**I wear the chain I forged in life,** replied the Ghost. I made it link by link, and yard by yard; **I girded it on of my own free will, and of my own free will I wore it.**"

"**'Mankind was my business.** The **common welfare** was my business; **charity, mercy, forbearance, and benevolence,** were, all, my business. The dealings of my trade were but a drop of water in the comprehensive ocean of my

business!"

"Why did I walk through crowds of fellow-beings with my eyes turned down, and never raise them to that blessed Star which led the Wise Men to a poor abode!"

"Without their visits, said the Ghost, 'you cannot hope to shun the path I tread."

***Without encountering difficulty, one cannot expect to change. We think we ought to experience happiness in this world, that this world ought to give us what we want ... nothing is further from the truth. Who promised happiness? Who made that a condition of your birth? You were born in pain and may likely die after negotiating more pain. Throughout your life: pain. And yet, pain instructs, hopes, makes stronger ... if you allow it. With suffering, Frankl once said, there is always at least the opportunity, the potential, for growth. Peter Levine, too, in his book Trauma and Memory said, "In his landmark book The Hero with a Thousand Faces, the eminent mythologist Joseph Campbell [...] makes a compelling case that it is precisely this coming to terms with one's destiny, through meeting a great challenge (whether external or internal) and then mastering it with clear direction, courage, and perseverance, that is at the core of this universal archetype, the hero/heroine myth." Go, then, and seek what you want where you least want to look...***

"The misery with them [the spirits] all was, clearly, that they sought to interfere, for good, in human matters, and had lost the power for ever."

### ***A calling for the living...***

"He tried to say, 'Humbug! but stopped at the first syllable."

***Even that which the cynic rests on (Humbug!) to make themselves feel better—because, truly, what's better than refusing the call for action for a cynic?—stops in its tracks. A few words, too, on cynicism: it's lazy. The kind of lazy that doesn't require you to think because you've already made up your misanthropic mind. I can respect skepticism—there's at least a curiosity and willingness to look at claims, to measure them—but cynicism shows people how high an opinion you have of yourself in the utterance. Of course, a cynic would never agree to being a narcissist—that, too, they'd spit at ... and yet, if honest enough, one would accept that narcissism is that which drives the mood. I know better. Life sucks. There's always something that will go wrong. That's not right. Yeah, but. All these put you at the centre of the knowing. Even those who hurt and are (almost) justified in their moods about the world because they've been hurt, even they can fall into this trap. Why me? Why does everybody take me the wrong way? Why are they looking at me like that? What should I***

say? Me, me, me—the epitome of narcissistic territory. One does not need to think highly of oneself to be a narcissist—I've counselled many who have terrible self-esteem—but only think disproportionately of themselves. Here, in Scrooge, we see the beginnings of his humbling...

## Stave Two: The First of the Three Spirits

"Scrooge went to bed again, and thought, and thought, and thought it over and over and over, and could make nothing of it. **The more he thought, the more perplexed he was; and the more he endeavoured not to think, the more he thought.**"

"He resolved to lie awake until the hour was passed; and, considering that he could no more go to sleep than go to Heaven, this was perhaps the wisest resolution in his power."

"Scrooge could not have told anybody why, if anybody could have asked him; but he **had a special desire to see the Spirit in his cap; and begged him to be covered.** 'What!' exclaimed the Ghost, 'would you so soon put out, with worldly hands, the light I give? Is it not enough that you are one of those whose passions made this cap, and force me through whole trains of years to wear it low upon my brow!'"

*Isn't this the case—that we want to shut out the things we ought to see. I heard it said recently that refusing to speak about one who has died is condemning them to another death (The Equalizer 2). And again, this time the psychiatrist and psychotherapist Irvin Yalom's: "Some day soon, perhaps in forty years, there will be no one alive who has ever known me. That's when I will be truly dead - when I exist in no one's memory. I thought a lot about how someone very old is the last living individual to have known some person or cluster of people. When that person dies, the whole cluster dies, too, vanishes from the living memory. I wonder who that person will be for me. Whose death will make me truly dead?" (Love's Executioner)*

"'You recollect the way?' inquired the Spirit. 'Remember it!' cried Scrooge with fervour - 'I could walk it blindfold.' 'Strange to have forgotten it for so many years!' observed the Ghost. 'Let us go on.'"

*How much do we forget that is still locked in there somehow with only a key required to open it...*

"'You fear the world so much,' she answered, gently. 'All your other hopes have merged into the hope of being beyond the chance of its sordid reproach. I **have seen your nobler aspirations fall off one by one**, until the master-passion, Gain, engrosses you. Have I not?'"

*Though the accusation here is towards money, how true, too, is this for many other 'vices' ... though we may not think of it as such. After all, who considers fear a vice? Ah, but yes, it stings you all the same until the things that once gave you hope disappear like smoke in a storm.*

"The noise in this room was perfectly tumultuous, for there were more children there, than Scrooge in his agitated state of mind could count; and [...] they were not forty children conducting themselves like one, but **every child was conducting itself like forty**. The consequences were uproarious beyond belief; **but no one seemed to care; on the contrary, the mother and daughter laughed heartily, and enjoyed it very much.**"

"'Leave me! Take me back. Haunt me no longer!' In the struggle, if that can be called a struggle in which the Ghost with no visible resistance on its own part was undisturbed by any effort of its adversary, Scrooge observed that its light was burning high and bright; and dimly connecting that with its influence over him, he seized the extinguisher-cap, and by a sudden action pressed it down upon its head. The Spirit dropped beneath it, so that the extinguisher covered its whole form; but **though Scrooge pressed it down with all his force, he could not hide the light**: which streamed from under it, in an unbroken flood upon the ground."

*No matter how thick the black of night, the smallest of flames overpowers the darkest of nights.*

### Stave Three: The Second of the Three Spirits

"he wished to challenge the Spirit on the moment of its appearance, and did not wish to be taken by surprise and made nervous. [...] Now, being prepared for almost anything, he was not by any means prepared for nothing; and, consequently, when the Bell struck One, and no shape appeared, he was taken with a violent fit of trembling."

"'Forgive me if I am wrong. It has been done in your name, or at least in that of your family,' said Scrooge. '**There are some upon this earth of yours,**' returned the Spirit, '**who lay claim to know us, and who do their deeds of passion, pride, ill-will, hatred, envy, bigotry, and selfishness in our name, who are as strange to us and all our kith and kin, as if they had never lived. Remember that, and charge their doings on themselves, not us.'**"

*How often evil is conducted "in the name of" one good thing or another. Blasted pride—charge one's own evil to oneself, no matter how one tries to hide it. Or, better yet, to the Thing that lies behind the evil. To think on this for a second, consider what biblical scholar NT Wright said in his commentary on the book of 1 Peter: "How easy it will have been, as it still is, for the Christians then to demonize their visible, human opponents, to*



regard them as the real source of the problem. Now at last we see that this isn't the case. There is a real enemy." (*emphasis mine*). And further: "As C. S. Lewis said when writing about his world-famous book *The Screwtape Letters*, [...] some people dismiss the idea of a devil by thinking of a ridiculous little person with horns and hooves wearing red tights. They can't believe in a creature like that, so they decide they can't believe in the devil. Other people become so fascinated with the devil that they can think of little else, and suppose that every ordinary problem in life, or difficulty in someone else's personality, is due to direct devilish intervention. Lewis steers a wise path between these two extremes, and so should we. But perhaps, for many of my readers, the danger may be more in ignoring the tempter than in overdramatizing him. [...]

R]ecognizing the existence and power of the devil, and learning to see him behind not only temptations to sin but also persecution and suffering [...] enables you to take the position which the rest of the letter has been advocating. When, two hundred years ago, many Western countries took a decisive move towards democracy, this was sometimes (not always) accompanied by a resolute dismissal of God, or public religion, from the civic and social stage. We were the masters now! But the danger with that, as has been apparent throughout the last two centuries, is that once you get rid of God you get rid, too, of the devil; and then you yourself, and your friends, or your party, or your country, take the role of God, while your enemies take the role of the devil. And that leads to disaster." And, here, my thoughts on Wright's commentary: "Where there is no God we see the devil in those who piss us off, instead of the satan in their shadows. It is not our enemies that are the Enemy—it is that who stands behind the enemy. Those who persecute are but a vessel for evil. How difficult it is to see this when you're in the middle of it... William Ramsey once said, "One of the most striking proofs of the personal existence of Satan... is found in the fact, that he has so influenced the minds of multitudes in reference to his existence and doings, as to make them believe that he does not exist." Best to keep this in mind..." Though all this may appear strained to see in Dickens's *Carol*, it all lies beneath the surface.

"It was a remarkable quality of the Ghost [...] that notwithstanding his gigantic size, he could accommodate himself to any place with ease; and that he stood beneath a low roof quite as gracefully and like a supernatural creature, as it was possible he could have done in any lofty hall."

"And how did little Tim behave?' asked Mrs Cratchit [...] 'As good as gold,' said Bob, 'and better. Somehow he gets thoughtful sitting by himself so much, and thinks the strangest things you ever heard. He told me, coming home, that **he hoped the people saw him in the church, because he was a cripple, and it might be pleasant to them to remember upon Christmas Day, who made lame beggars walk and blind men see.**'"

"If these shadows remain unaltered by the Future, none other of my race,"

returned the Ghost, 'will find him here.

*What then? If he be like to die, he had better do it, and decrease the surplus population.'* Scrooge hung his head to hear his own words quoted by the Spirit, and was overcome with penitence and grief. 'Man,' said the Ghost, 'if man you be in heart, not adamant, forbear that wicked cant until you have discovered What the surplus is, and Where it is. Will you decide what men shall live, what men shall die? It may be, that in the sight of Heaven, you are more worthless and less fit to live than millions like this poor man's child. Oh God! to hear the Insect on the leaf pronouncing on the too much life among his hungry brothers in the dust!'"

***Even then did people believe in a surplus population. Why, oh why, are we becoming even more anti-natalist as we 'advance'? Why not, as the Durant's did, take a leaf out of the book of history and think back to Ancient Rome whereby Julius Caesar had to introduce benefits to those who stopped having kids. One might argue (as I've heard Elon Musk and others do) that the fall of empires is when we stop having children ... or watch them die with no compassion.***

"his offences carry their own punishment, and I have nothing to say against him. [...] I am sorry for him; I couldn't be angry with him if I tried. Who suffers by his ill whims! Himself, always."

***One finds in one's own bad actions their own punishment. It reminds me of something CS Lewis said long ago: "There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, "Thy will be done," and those to whom God says, in the end, "Thy will be done." All that are in Hell, choose it. Without that self-choice there could be no Hell. No soul that seriously and constantly desires joy will ever miss it. Those who seek find. Those who knock it is opened." (The Great Divorce). Ought we not take pity (rather than responsibility ... or anger) on those who choose evil? God, I hope so for it'll feel much better.***

## **Stave Four: The Last of the Spirits**

"They were a boy and girl. Yellow, meagre, ragged, scowling, wolfish; but prostrate, too, in their humility. Where graceful youth should have filled their features out, and touched them with its freshest tints, a stale and shrivelled hand, like that of age, had pinched, and twisted them, and pulled them into shreds. Where angels might have sat enthroned, devils lurked, and glared out menacing. No change, no degradation, no perversion of humanity, in any grade, through all the mysteries of wonderful creation, has monsters half so horrible and dread Scrooge started back, appalled. Having them shown to him in this way, he tried to say they were fine children, but the words choked themselves, rather than be parties to a lie of such enormous magnitude. 'Spirit! are they yours?' Scrooge could say no more. '**They are Man's,**' said the Spirit, looking down upon them. '**And they cling to me, appealing from their fathers. This**



**boy is Ignorance. This girl is Want. Beware them both,** and all of their degree, but **most of all beware this boy, for on his brow I see that written which is Doom, unless the writing be erased.** Deny it!' cried the Spirit, stretching out its hand towards the city. 'Slander those who tell it ye! Admit it for your factious purposes, and make it worse. And bide the end!'

*From John Archibald Wheeler: "We live on an island surrounded by a sea of ignorance. As our island of knowledge grows, so does the shore of our ignorance." Beware. Or, from Marcelo Gleiser: "As the island of Knowledge grows, so do the shores of our ignorance – the boundary between the known and the unknown. Learning more about the world doesn't lead to a point closer to a final destination but to more questions and mysteries."*

"The only emotion that the Ghost could show him, caused by the event, was one of pleasure."

""Heartily sorry," [Scrooge's nephew] said, "for your good wife. If I can be of any service to you in any way," he said, giving me his card, "that's where I live. Pray come to me." 'Now, it wasn't,' cried Bob, 'for the sake of anything he might be able to do for us, so much as for his kind way, that this was quite delightful. It really seemed as if he had known our Tiny Tim, and felt with us.'"

"The Spirit stood among the graves, and pointed down to One. [Scrooge] advanced towards it trembling. The Phantom was exactly as it had been, but he dreaded that he saw new meaning in its solemn shape. 'Before I draw nearer to that stone to which you point,' said Scrooge, 'answer me one question. **Are these the shadows of the things that Will be, or are they shadows of things that May be, only?**' Still the Ghost pointed downward to the grave by which it stood. 'Men's courses will foreshadow certain ends, to which, if persevered in, they must lead,' said Scrooge. 'But **if the courses be departed from, the ends will change. Say it is thus with what you show me!**' The Spirit was immovable as ever. **Scrooge crept towards it, trembling as he went; and following the finger, read upon the stone of the neglected grave his own name, EBENEZER SCROOGE.**"

""**Assure me that I yet may change these shadows you have shown me, by an altered life!**" The kind hand [of the Spirit] trembled. 'I will honour Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year. **I will live in the Past, Present, and the Future.** **The Spirits of all Three shall strive within me. I will not shut out the lessons that they teach.** Oh, tell me I may sponge away the writing on this stone!'"

## **Stave Five: The End of It**

"In the afternoon, he turned his steps towards his nephew's house. He passed the door a dozen times, before he had the courage to go up and knock. But he made a dash, and did it"

***Sometimes one requires to prepare and prepare again before one finally has the guts to do the thing they fear. But do the thing they must. Nobody in history will remember you in a few generations—why not just step out and do the thing you fear?***

“Some people laughed to see the alteration in him, but he let them laugh, and little heeded them; for he was wise enough to know that **nothing ever happened on this globe, for good, at which some people did not have their fill of laughter in the outset; and knowing that such as these would be blind anyway**, he thought it quite as well that they should wrinkle up their eyes in grins, as have the malady in less attractive forms. His own heart laughed: and that was quite enough for him.”

***Reminds me of what Schopenhauer is said to have said: "All truth passes through three stages. First, it is ridiculed. Second, it is violently opposed. Third, it is accepted as being self-evident." As with many an old quote, this isn't exactly what he wrote, but in the preface to his 1819 work The World as Will and Representation, he did say, "To truth only a brief celebration of victory is allowed between the two long periods during which it is condemned as paradoxical, or disparaged as trivial." Scrooge now lived a new life, a new Truth. So what if people ridiculed him! And so what if they tease you for doing what is right.***

## **Final thoughts...**

**Quantum change.** That's what psychologists call it: a sudden, dramatic, and enduring transformation that affects a broad range of personal emotion, cognition, and behavior. "This phenomenon" according to a paper by Bill Miller (<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/15048692/>) "has been described since the beginnings of psychology, most notably by William James in Varieties of Religious Experience." These experiences happen in and outside psychotherapy ... but one thing is certain—they endure. Scrooge experienced thus. And should we not pray, then, that we ought to as well? One that depends glee for the one experiencing it... I endeavour to read this Carol each Christmas. And it always puts a smile on my face I watch the Disney film with my boys, too, each Christmas (Jim Carey portrays Scrooge magnificently!). How often do we see those who try to make the season less about Christ and even less about Christmas. But how can you take "Christ" out of Christ-mas? One often does though. Let us remember "there reason for the season" and do good to those around us. At the very least, offer a smile—make somebody's day a little brighter. If you will eventually be forgotten, why not spread a little happiness while you're here? Make it ripple on. After all, there's no telling how your smile may cause another to smile and then that smile communicate something to another that that person really needed to hear that day ... or see. Something,

perhaps, that would save one's life. God bless us, everyone!

*These notes were collected by psychotherapist and author Emil Barna in in his efforts to assist with professional development and further education for himself and those who read them. You can find out more about Emil by visiting [www.barnacc.com](http://www.barnacc.com)*

***"History is fiction that did happen. Whereas fiction is history that might have happened."***

**—André Gide**

***"Fiction is informed by whispers of truth."***

**—Jack Carr**

***"A text without a context is a pretext to a proof text."***

**—Dr. Don Carson**