

PARENTS GUIDE TO

movie messages: *The Muppet Christmas Carol*

Seek and find worldviews
while having fun as a family

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The Muppet Christmas Carol

BY **PLUGGED IN**
ILLUSTRATIONS BY
SCOTT BRUNDAGE

The entertainment industry bombards us with obvious and subtle messages. But we often don't recognize them as worldviews or notice how they skew our thinking. To help you and your family identify varying worldviews in the culture, play this game of Movie Messages while watching *The Muppet Christmas Carol*.

Note: For young children who aren't ready to play this game, you can introduce them to worldview training with a casual mention like, "Altruism means doing something for another that might not benefit you."





Directions:

1. Give every player a set of 10 worldview cards.
2. Watch *The Muppet Christmas Carol* until you reach an incident on the game board. Then pause the movie.
3. Each player chooses a card that matches the worldview identified in the movie and places it facedown. Then players turn over their cards to reveal their answers.*
4. The correct cards are removed from play. The cards deemed incorrect are returned to each player, and the movie continues.
5. This game doesn't cover every worldview in this movie. Players who have guessed wrong can catch up by calling out the correct worldview if it comes up again in the movie. (This can only be done with worldview cards that have been removed from play.)
6. The first player to get rid of eight cards is the winner.

*The **Hedonism** and **Ecocentrism** cards are not part of this movie's game board. If someone plays the Hedonism card and wants additional information, read Psalm 16:11: "You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore." If someone plays the Ecocentrism card and wants additional information, read Genesis 1:26: "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.'"

Be sure to first check out Plugged In's review to see if *The Muppet Christmas Carol* is right for your family.
FocusOnTheFamily.com/MuppetChristmasCarol

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ALTRUISM prioritizes the happiness or safety of others above our own.



ARISTOTELIANISM, named after the Greek philosopher Aristotle, relies on deductive reasoning, the value of hard work and a wariness of pursuing wealth, power or pleasure without first pursuing virtue.

Directions:

Cut out one set of either color, black-and-white or plain cards (from pages 4-6) for each player.



CAPITALISM is an economic system based on the laws of supply and demand. When demand is high and supply is low, items are usually more expensive.



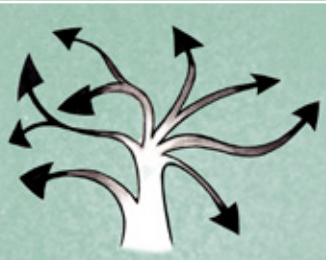
CHRISTIANITY tells us that our lives and salvation are dependent on God and our belief in and allegiance to His Son, Jesus.



SPIRITUALISM embraces the idea that a reality exists outside of our five senses. Spiritualists believe in ghosts, magic and communication with the dead.



ECOCENTRISM emphasizes that the welfare of nature—not humankind—should be our primary focus.



FREE WILL is a doctrine that tells us that our choices, *not our biology or our backgrounds,* determine who we ultimately become.



WORKS-ORIENTED THEOLOGY stresses that what we do in this life determines where we'll end up in the next.



HEDONISM asserts that pleasure is our ultimate goal, and we should do whatever makes us happy.



MISANTHROPISM takes a dim view of humanity overall, often based on preconceptions of humanity's flaws.

MOVIE REVIEWS

For a review of *The Muppet Christmas Carol* and other titles, visit **PluggedIn.com**, Focus on the Family's media review and discernment website.

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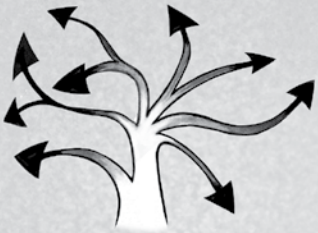
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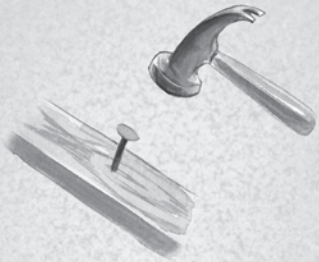
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movie messages: *The Muppet Christmas Carol*

Movie stop 3:45

Rizzo the Rat eats an apple. When Gonzo (playing Charles Dickens) protests, Rizzo says, "Hey, I'm creating scarcity! Drives the prices up."

What it is: Capitalism

Rizzo is referring to the economic laws that govern business practices not only in Charles Dickens' England but also in many areas around the world today. Capitalism itself is neither good nor bad. Most economic experts will tell us that this system works because it drives innovation and encourages everyone to work hard to provide for their loved ones. And when capitalism is paired with charity, it can be a deeply generous system. But Rizzo's passing remark reminds us that capitalism can also be about scarce products, high prices and squeezing as much money out of customers as possible. His comment also points to Scrooge's own version of capitalism, which isn't charitable at all. Scrooge wants to make money, period. He doesn't even enjoy the money he makes. He spends very little of it. Money, for Scrooge, is the point.

Read: Matthew 6:24

"No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money."

How to talk to tweens and teens:

The problem with Ebenezer Scrooge isn't that he's rich. As we see in *The Muppet Christmas Carol*, two gentlemen ask Scrooge for a charitable donation. To survive and thrive, charities depend on the generosity of others. The problem is that Scrooge isn't generous. He doesn't give to charity. He doesn't give to his own employees. He doesn't even give money to himself, really—he just sits in his cold, dark room. When you have money—whether it's a lot or just a little extra from a part-time job—it's important to ask God how He wants you to use it. Rather than using it only for your own benefit, think about how you might use it to help those in need.

What to say to young children:

Do you get an allowance? Do your parents pay you for any work you do around the house? Having money isn't bad, but it's important to use it wisely. Ask God how He would like you to use it. Perhaps you could use some of your money to help others. And always remember that the best things in life don't cost a thing. *These words are based on Hebrews 13:5.*

Movie stop 11:30

When Scrooge's nephew tries to wish Scrooge a merry Christmas, Scrooge snaps, "If I could work my will, every idiot who goes about with 'Merry Christmas' on his lips would be cooked with his own turkey and buried with a stake of holly through his heart!"

What it is: Misanthropism

We already know that Scrooge is a miser, unwilling to share his wealth with anyone. His statement goes a long way toward explaining why. It also unveils Scrooge's core belief that humanity is flawed, and he just doesn't like people, especially those who are prone to being happy or joyous. Now, few people would claim to be misanthropists. But this philosophy is more common than you might think—and it's becoming more common, judging by some comments we find on social media. Increasingly, we see how some people seem to be, like Scrooge, angry with humanity without much of a reason.

Read: Galatians 5:14

"The whole law is fulfilled in one word: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"

How to talk to tweens and teens:

Social media can be a pretty misanthropic place. Plenty of people troll, insult and try to humiliate others online. And it's often for superficial reasons, such as saying that people shouldn't wish others "Merry Christmas." We can all have bad days and lash out in anger when we shouldn't. Most of us have said, or written, something we wish we hadn't. But we should always keep that verse from Galatians in mind. And when we don't live up to it, we should be ready to apologize. Don't fall into a trap of becoming a misanthrope.

What to say to young children:

Think about a time when you got angry and said something you felt bad about afterward. Maybe you even yelled at someone you shouldn't have. How did you make up for it? When have you yelled at someone you shouldn't have? How did you make up for it? *These words are based on Ephesians 4:31-32.*

Continued on the next page.

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movie messages: *The Muppet Christmas Carol*

Movie stop 25:20

Jacob and Robert Marley appear to Scrooge.

What it is: Spiritualism

A very narrow definition of *spiritualism* is in this scene: The Marley brothers pay Scrooge a visit and sing a terrifying little song, warning him to change his ways. And while Scrooge expresses doubt that they exist—suggesting he might be imagining them because he ate something bad—they insist they're very real indeed. But the broader definition of *spiritualism* is to come. The three "ghosts" of Christmas act more like angels than spirits of the dead. Like some heavenly visitors from the Bible, they act as messengers, telling him, "Change your ways, Scrooge. Otherwise, what waits for you is worse than becoming a pillar of salt."

Read: Ephesians 6:12

"We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places."

How to talk to tweens and teens:

On Christmas Eve, Scrooge discovers the reality of a spiritual existence he normally can't see or touch on earth. That concept is a familiar one to Christians. We believe that heaven awaits those who follow Christ, and there's a hell (where it seems the Marleys ended up) for those who don't. Moreover, all these ghosts and spirits are effective storytelling tools for the original Charles Dickens, who used them to tell a tale about greed and sin and redemption. But we should also note that the Bible tells us we shouldn't try to connect with the spirits of the dead (Leviticus 19:31). Instead we should connect with the one, true God.

What to say to young children:

Robert and Jacob Marley might be kind of scary even though they crack jokes. Scrooge certainly is scared. We can all get scared at night, especially when we're kids. But God promises that He will be with us no matter how scary things seem, and He'll keep watch over us so the evil one can't hurt us. *These words are based on 2 Thessalonians 3:3.*

Movie stop 27:50

The Marley brothers sing to Scrooge, warning him, "Your chains are forged by what you say and do. So have your fun, when life is done a nightmare waits for you."

What it is: Works-oriented theology

Jacob and Robert Marley suggest that once we die, we are rewarded or punished for what we've done in life. Loads of people who believe in an afterlife would agree with that statement. Indeed, the Bible talks about how Christ will "repay each person according to what he has done" (Matthew 16:27). But the Marley brothers are skipping over a huge factor that determines whether people go to heaven or hell.

Read: Ephesians 2:8-9

"By grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."

How to talk to tweens and teens:

God loves it when we're kind and charitable and loving, and it certainly improves the world around us. But when the Marley brothers tell Scrooge that his "chains are forged by what you say and do," that's not exactly true. The Bible makes it quite clear that we're *all* bad, in a spiritual sense. We might not be as greedy or mean as Scrooge, but we've done plenty to separate us from God. And no matter what we do, we can't work our way into heaven. But we can ask God to forgive us for all the bad actions, thoughts and words we've done or had, and we can decide to follow His Son. That's the only way—not through kindness or charity—that we can avoid hanging out with Jacob and Robert Marley in the afterlife.

What to say to young children:

The Marley brothers might scare some kids. But what they say here is *really* scary. All of us create some pretty long chains in our lives from all the bad things we've done. There's no way we can break free from them on our own. But here's the good news: Jesus can break those chains if we ask Him to. And when Jesus sets us free, Marley's song isn't scary anymore. *These words are based on Romans 6:23.*

Continued on the next page.



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movie messages: *The Muppet Christmas Carol*

Movie stop 35:15

During Scrooge's time with the Ghost of Christmas Past, we catch a glimpse of a bust of Aristotle, along with other intellectual luminaries.

What it is: Aristotelianism

Aristotle, who lived between 384 and 322 B.C., is one of ancient Greece's most famous philosophers. He wrote about almost every topic you can think of: mathematics, politics and even composed poetry. The philosophy of Aristotelianism is a little too complex to get into here, but the most important thing to know is that Aristotle thought virtue was a really big deal. He praised all virtues, especially the virtue of work. But he also believed that while work is important, we shouldn't overdo it. Scrooge never learned this lesson in school, and maybe we can blame his headmaster (played by Sam the Eagle). "Work hard, work long and be constructive!" he told the boy. "Work hard, lad, and one day, your life will be as solid as this very building!" Ironically, the building isn't very strong, and moments later all those busts slide right off the shelf.

Read: Mark 6:31

"[Jesus] said to [His disciples], 'Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while.' For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat."

How to talk to tweens and teens:

Working, and working hard, is important. We should always try to do our best whenever we do anything. But Aristotle believed that balance is important in our lives. Virtue is often found between two extremes, he believed, and that can extend to work and play. This view echoes the Bible. You'll find plenty of verses that encourage us to work and work well to glorify the Lord. But you'll also find plenty of other verses that remind us to enjoy all of God's gifts, especially the gift of life.

What to say to young children:

Work isn't much fun for many of us. We don't love cleaning our rooms or washing dishes or doing homework. But work can be a good thing if we do our best because we love God (Colossians 3:23). Once we get our chores done, we can rest and play. Rest and play are good things too. We just need to remember that when we're working, we should do our very best—because that's what God would like us to do. And when we're playing, we should remember that having fun is a gift from God, as well. *These words are based on 1 Corinthians 10:31.*

Movie stop 56:18

When Bob Cratchit and Tiny Tim come home from church, Bob's wife asks how Tiny Tim managed. Bob says that he was "as good as gold and better." Tiny Tim apparently hoped that people would see him with his crutches. "It might be pleasant for them to remember upon Christmas Day, who made lame beggars walk and blind men see," Tiny Tim apparently said.

What it is: Christianity

The Christian worldview is in *The Muppet Christmas Carol*: The story is about Christmas, and Christmas is all about the birth of Christ. While Tiny's Tim's line is pulled almost directly from the original Charles Dickens story, *The Muppet Christmas Carol* might emphasize Christianity a bit more than the original book. It isn't the first time the movie references the Christian faith, and it won't be the last—but it might be the most explicit. If you're looking for a game within this game, it might be fun to watch the movie again and see how many references to God and Christianity you find.

Read: Luke 18:35, 40-43

"As [Jesus] drew near to Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging. . . . And Jesus stopped and commanded him to be brought to him. And when he came near, [Jesus] asked him, 'What do you want me to do for you?' He said, 'Lord, let me recover my sight.' And Jesus said to him, 'Recover your sight; your faith has made you well.' And immediately he recovered his sight and followed [Jesus], glorifying God. And all the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God."

How to talk to tweens and teens:

Tiny Tim knows his Bible. Scripture contains several examples of Jesus healing the blind, the lame, the hurting and the sick. But He didn't always perform miracles as people expected. For example, He used mud to cure blindness, and He healed people from a distance. In the case of Lazarus, Jesus arrived after His friend had died. And yet Christ saved him anyway—raising him from the dead. It's never too late to save someone, and we see that in Scrooge himself. While *The Muppet Christmas Carol* doesn't always get its theology right, it sets this story of personal redemption around the birthday of the world's only real Redeemer. And with Scrooge ultimately serving as Christ's tool in the lives of the Cratchit family, we learn that this lame little boy does indeed walk again.

What to say to young children:

Bob Cratchit and his family are Christians—even though they're poor, and it doesn't seem like they have a lot to thank God for. Tiny Tim seems to be the most faithful of them all. Is it hard to thank God when you're hurting? Sure it is. But Tiny Tim reminds us how much we still have to be thankful for. *These words are based on 1 Thessalonians 5:18.*

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movie messages: *The Muppet Christmas Carol*

Movie stop 1:10:10

When the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come shows Scrooge one last terrifying vision, Scrooge asks an important question: "Are these the shadows of things that *will* be, or are they the shadows of things that *may* be only?" When the ghost doesn't answer, Scrooge answers for himself. "These events *can* be changed," he says.

What it is: Free will

Some worldviews and philosophies insist that we don't have any choices in life. But when we believe in free will—that we can choose the kind of people we're going to be—it makes a huge difference. We know that Scrooge's schooling taught him to work too hard. His difficult upbringing may have made him prone to ignore the needs of the people around him. But in the end, Scrooge chose to overcome the bad lessons he learned. Late in life, he chose to change—and that's not easy to do. But if Scrooge can change, so can we.

Read: Revelation 3:20

"Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me."

How to talk to tweens and teens:

Free will is a powerful, beautiful thing. When God created us, He didn't make automatons. He wants people to choose to love and follow Him. Of course, that also means we can choose *not* to love or follow Him, just as Scrooge apparently did for so many decades. Free will is like a door that is always in front of us, ready to be opened. Every day is a little like Scrooge's Christmas morning: We can choose to live for ourselves or for others.

What to say to young children:

Just as Scrooge had a choice to become a better person, you have that same choice every day. God likes it when we choose to follow Him and His guidelines for our lives. *These words are based on Joshua 24:15.*

Movie stop 1:16:00

As the movie comes to a close, Scrooge sings about how much he's changed—including his promise to "share the wealth."

What it is: Altruism

We could call *altruism* charity, but when we make it a real habit instead of just something we do occasionally, it becomes our worldview. Most versions of *A Christmas Carol*, including this one, indicate that Scrooge was as good as his word. Doing good wasn't just a passing fancy, a quickly fading response to a Christmas Day revelation. Scrooge never returned to his old habits, and he made a huge difference in people's lives—especially in the life of Tiny Tim. In his song, Scrooge sings, "With a thankful heart that is wide awake / I do make this promise, every breath I take / will be used now to sing Your praise / and to beg You to share my days." Who else would Scrooge be praising in his song but God?

Read: Hebrews 13:16

"Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God."

How to talk to tweens and teens:

Who do you know who could use a little encouragement? A little help? Or maybe even a friend? Altruism isn't always easy. It can cost time and effort, and you may not always see the fruit of your labor. You don't need to be rich to be altruistic. But to share what you have—including yourself—with other people is pleasing to God. And Christmas is a great excuse to give the gift of yourself.

What to say to young children:

Scrooge gave the people around him money. But you don't need to spend money to give a great gift. Often, the greatest gift you can give someone is your kindness. Think about ways you can show kindness to the people around you today. Every day you have a chance to share God's love by showing a little kindness to someone, even if it's hard. How can you show kindness to your parents? What about your friends and siblings? *These words are based on 1 John 3:17.*



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