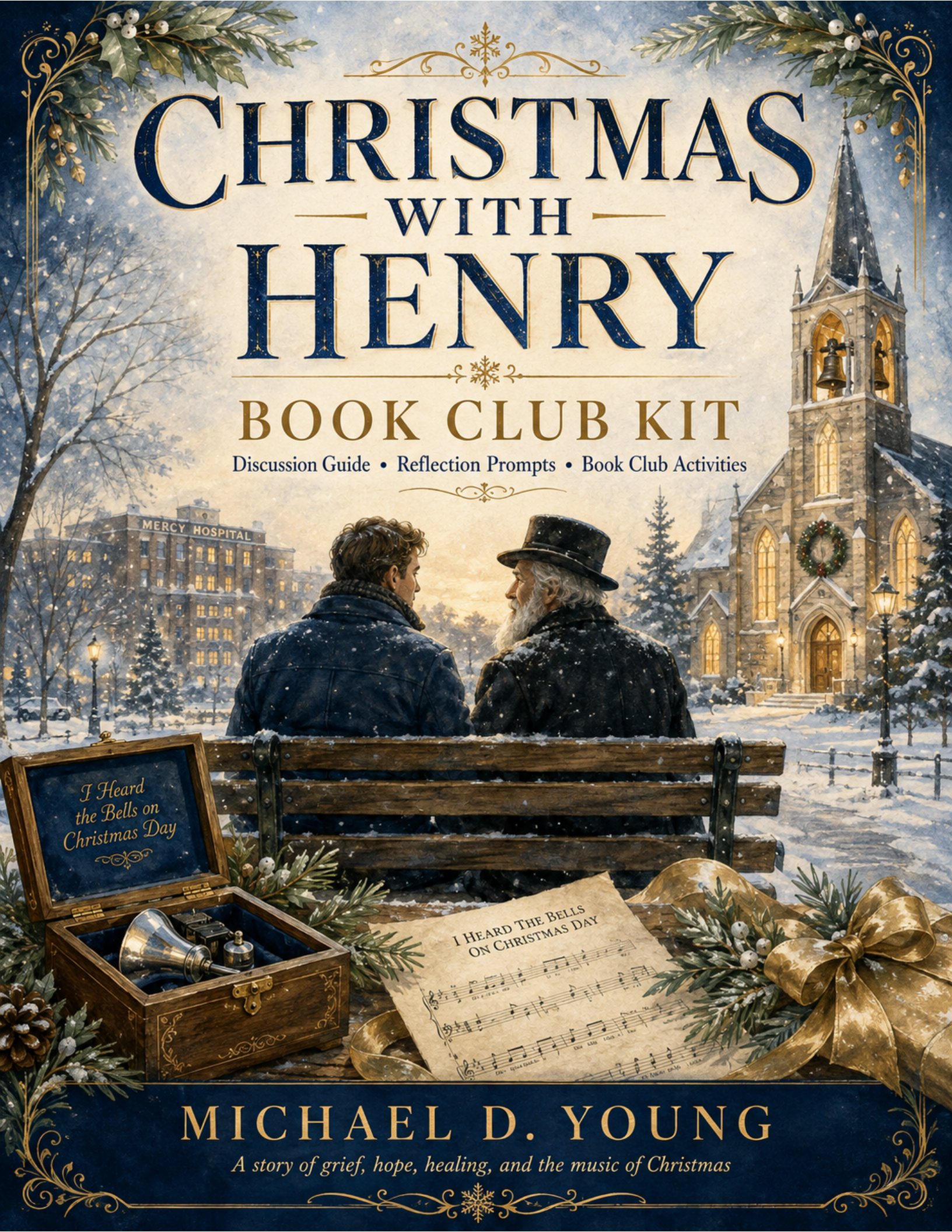




CHRISTMAS — WITH — HENRY

BOOK CLUB KIT

Discussion Guide • Reflection Prompts • Book Club Activities

*I Heard
the Bells on
Christmas Day*

*I HEARD THE BELLS
ON CHRISTMAS DAY*

MICHAEL D. YOUNG

A story of grief, hope, healing, and the music of Christmas

WELCOME — TO THE — KIT

SPOILER-LIGHT OVERVIEW

Christmas with Henry follows Charley Morgan as he keeps vigil while his wife, Megan, faces a dangerous brain-cancer surgery. During walks near the hospital, he meets a mysterious old man named Henry, whose stories of love, loss, faith, and Christmas music gradually reshape Charley's understanding of grief and hope. As the novel unfolds, the familiar carol "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day" becomes a thread that binds past and present, sorrow and consolation.



WHY BOOK CLUBS LOVE IT

- Emotional but hopeful
- Richly connected to Christmas music and literature
- Ideal for meaningful December discussion

CONTENT NOTES

- terminal illness
- surgery and death of a spouse
- grief and mourning
- war memories

HOW TO USE THIS KIT

1. Read the story.
2. Listen to "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day."
3. Choose discussion questions that fit your group.
4. End with a reflection or activity.

CHARACTERS AND SETTING

MAIN CHARACTERS



Charley Morgan —
a husband and father trying to
stay steady while Megan's life
hangs in the balance.



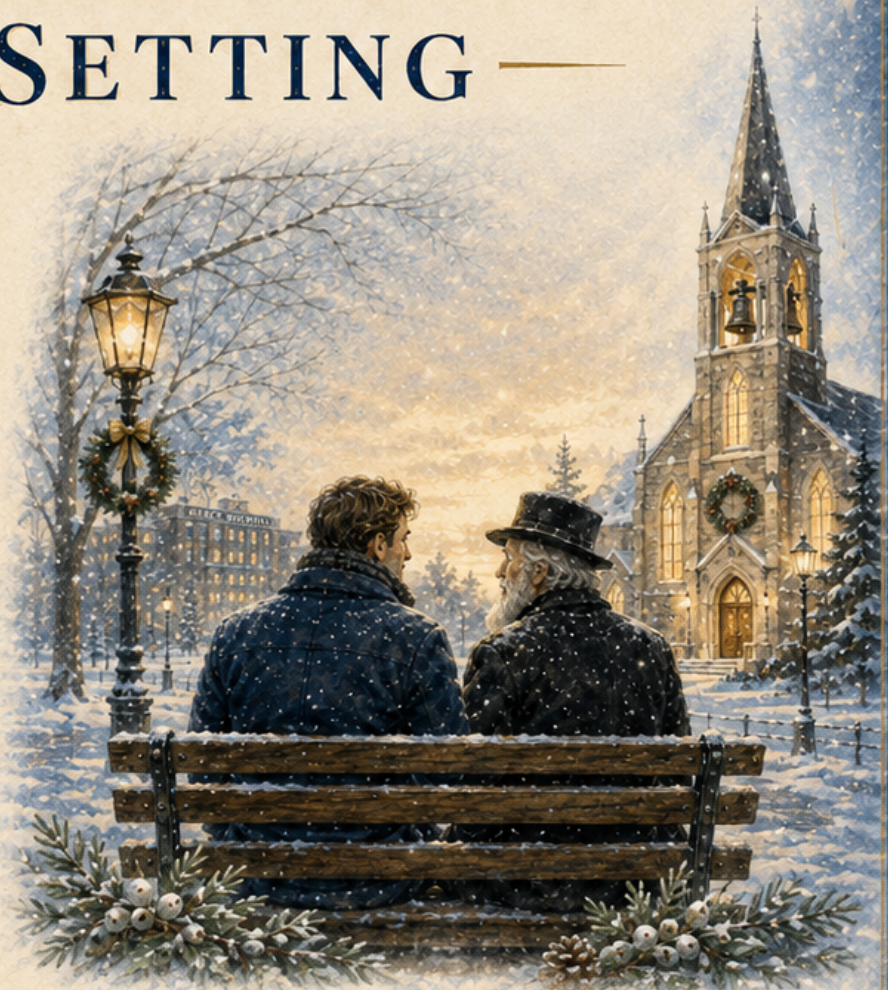
Megan Morgan —
Charley's beloved wife, whose
illness gives the story its
urgency and tenderness.



Henry —
an elderly stranger in the park
whose wisdom, losses, and
identity become central to
the novel.



Charley's sons —
reminders of the family future
Charley is fighting to preserve.



THE SETTING



A hospital, a park bench, and
a nearby church during
Christmas week.



Henry's memories reach back
into nineteenth-century
America and Europe.



Bells, winter weather, and
holiday rituals create a bridge
between present pain and
lasting hope.

RELATIONSHIP LENS

*Charley comes to Henry in
confusion and sorrow.
Henry offers companionship,
testimony, and perspective,
helping Charley see that
grief and hope can exist
side by side.*

THEMES AND SYMBOLS

MAJOR THEMES

- ❄️ Grief and endurance
- ❄️ Hope in the middle of sorrow
- ❄️ Faith under pressure
- ❄️ The healing power of music and words
- ❄️ Memory, legacy, and family love
- ❄️ Choosing to live after loss

SYMBOLS AND MOTIFS



Church bells — the call of hope that breaks through despair.



"I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day" — a song that gives language to wounded faith.



The bench — a meeting place where sorrow turns toward understanding.



Snow and winter — outward signs of loss, stillness, and waiting.



The tree and evergreen imagery — enduring life and continuing love.



The gift bell or music box — a tangible reminder that hope can be carried forward.



PASSAGES TO NOTICE

Watch for moments when Henry quotes poetry, reflects on grief, or reframes Christmas as a season where joy and sorrow can coexist.



CHRISTMAS WITH HENRY

BOOK CLUB KIT

Discussion Questions I

- 
1. What makes Charley receptive to Henry's friendship so quickly?
 2. How does the hospital setting intensify the story's emotional stakes?
 3. Why are the bells important from the opening scene forward?
 4. What do Henry's early stories reveal about perseverance and vocation?
 5. How does the novel portray the tension between medical hope and spiritual hope?
 6. What scenes best show Charley moving from panic to attentiveness?

Tip: Choose 3–4 questions for shorter meetings, or discuss all 6 for a fuller session.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS II

7. Which of Henry's losses or memories affected you most, and why?

8. How does the story connect grief with creativity, work, and purpose?

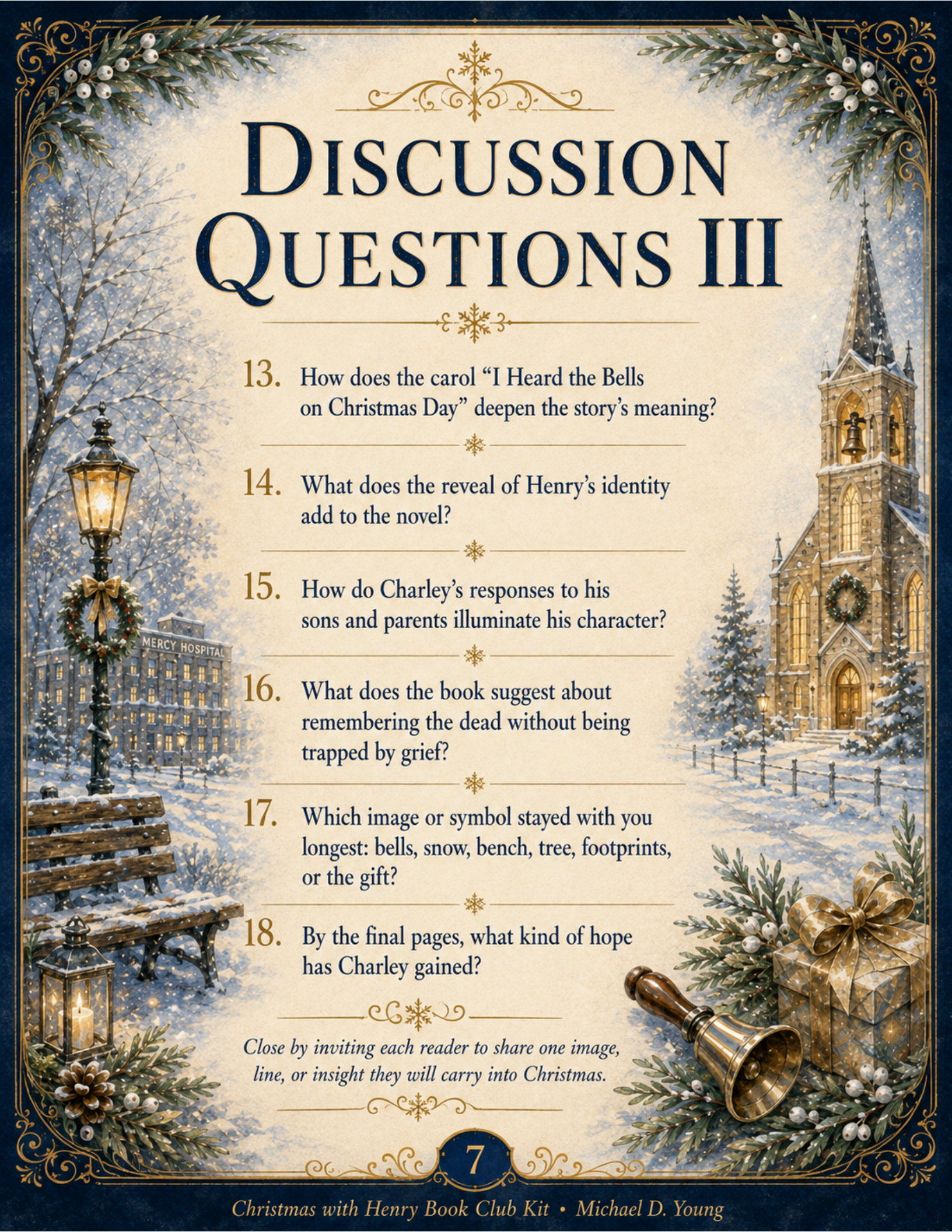
9. What role do Christmas traditions play in the novel: comfort, irritation, reminder, or all three?

10. Discuss the line of thought behind "the path of greatest hope." Do you agree with Henry?

11. How does the novel show that faith does not erase pain?

12. In what ways does Henry function as mentor, witness, or even miracle?

*You may want to pause after Questions 10–12;
they often invite deeper personal reflection.*

The background of the page is a detailed illustration of a winter night. On the right, a large, ornate church with a tall steeple and glowing windows stands in the snow. To the left, a multi-story building with 'MERCY HOSPITAL' on its facade is visible. In the foreground, a wooden bench sits under a street lamp, and a large, wrapped gift with a gold bow and a bell lies on the snow. The entire scene is framed by a decorative border of holly leaves and berries.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS III

13. How does the carol “I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day” deepen the story’s meaning?

14. What does the reveal of Henry’s identity add to the novel?

15. How do Charley’s responses to his sons and parents illuminate his character?

16. What does the book suggest about remembering the dead without being trapped by grief?

17. Which image or symbol stayed with you longest: bells, snow, bench, tree, footprints, or the gift?

18. By the final pages, what kind of hope has Charley gained?

Close by inviting each reader to share one image, line, or insight they will carry into Christmas.

ACTIVITIES AND REFLECTION

GROUP ACTIVITIES

-  Listen together to “I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day” and discuss which line best matches the novel.
-  Bring a meaningful Christmas song and share why it matters to you.
-  Write a one-paragraph message Henry might leave your group.
-  Create a memory ornament or bell-themed bookmark.

REFLECTION AND JOURNALING

-  When have you needed hope that felt stronger than your circumstances?
-  What holiday tradition has helped you through a difficult season?
-  Who has been a “Henry” in your life?

TAKE-HOME IDEA

Display a bell, ornament, or evergreen sprig somewhere visible this season as a reminder that joy and grief can coexist.



FACILITATOR GUIDE

SUGGESTED 60-75 MINUTE MEETING

- ❄️ **OPENING (10 MIN):**
Share a favorite Christmas song or memory.
- ❄️ **WARM-UP (5 MIN):**
What first drew you into the story?
- ❄️ **DISCUSSION (35-40 MIN):**
Choose 6-8 questions from the kit.
- ❄️ **ACTIVITY (10 MIN):**
Read aloud a verse of "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day" and reflect.
- ❄️ **CLOSING (5-10 MIN):**
Invite each person to finish the sentence, "This story reminded me..."

OPTIONAL CLOSING REFLECTION

Give space for groups that want a reverent ending, a prayer, or a quiet minute of gratitude and remembrance.

HOST TIPS

- Because the novel engages illness and bereavement, create room for tenderness and pauses.
- Let participants pass if a question feels too personal.
- Balance painful moments with the story's movement toward hope.

May the bells of Christmas call your group toward hope, compassion, and peace.