52 Little Lessons from Les Miserables

by

Bob Welch

52 Little Lessons from Les Misérables walks readers through Hugo's masterpiece, extracting dozens of uniquely spiritual reflections from this enduring portrait of poverty, social injustice, mercy, and redemption. Jean Valjean's life provides the truest example of why real love is found in the grittiest places, and that hearts are made whole beneath the crush of mercy. Hugo's writing is an intersection of faith and reality—those places where mercy becomes an inroad to a whole heart, and where love is only truly received when it is given without condition.

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The reading sampler here contains a list of the characters in Les Miserables, the author's note, and four of the fifty-two lessons. The first, Lesson 4: Every Personal Encounter Matters, recounts the life-changing encounter Valjean had with the bishop and posits what our lives would be like if we stopped thinking of things as ours and instead remembered that all belongs to Christ. The second, Lesson 13: We Need to See People as God Sees People, recounts Fantine's firing at the factory after a note is intercepted and it is discovered that she is with child out of wedlock. Fantine is rescued by Madelaine, who offers to pay her bills and care for her, even though she is a fallen woman in the eyes of man. The third, Lesson 24: Don't Rush to Judgment, takes a moment to discuss Hugo's treatment of the the nuns in his book and suggests that maybe our prejudices are getting in the way of seeing the world the way God wants us to see it. The fourth, Lesson 47: Religion Isn't the Answer, asks readers to reconsider the way they view their relationship with God.

List of Characters

Primary Characters

Jean Valjean (Zhan Val-zhan)—an ex-convict who begins life anew while being tracked down by a tireless police inspector

Bishop Myriel—compassionate bishop whose mercy on Valjean changes the ex-convict's life (full name: Monseigneur Charles François-Bienvenu Myriel)

Inspector Javert (Jah-ver)—letter-of-the-law police inspector whose obsession is to bring justice to Valjean

Cosette (Ko-zet)—Fantine's daughter, saved by Valjean from the clutches of a cruel and cunning innkeeper couple, the Thénardiers

Fantine (Fahn-teen)—unmarried working-class girl whittled to her core by poverty; mother of Cosette

Marius Pontmercy (Mar-ee-us Pohn-mair-see)—an idealistic student who falls in love with Cosette

The Thénardiers (Ten-are-dee-ays)—husband-wife innkeepers bent on exploiting all who come near, including Cosette

Others

Bamatabois (Bam'-ah-tah-bwah)—A prospective "customer" whose degradation of Fantine triggers her wrath

Champmathieu (Chomp-mot-two)—poor, uneducated man who is identified, tried, and almost convicted as being Jean Valjean

Enjolras (Ahn-jol-rahs)—leader of the student revolutionary group Friends of the ABC (*ah bay say*), so-named from a play on the French word *abaissés* (the “lowly” or “abased”)

Éponine (Epp-oh-neen)—a daughter of the Thénardiers who secretly loves Marius and redeems herself with that love

Fauchelevent (Fosh-luh-vohn)—man saved by Valjean in Montreuil-sur-Mer who later helps Valjean in a Paris convent

Gavroche (Gav-rosh)—likable street urchin—and son of the Thénardiers—who gives his all to the student revolutionary cause

Gillenormand (He-lare-nor-ma)—Marius’s grandfather, a devout monarchist and self-seeking part of Paris’s bourgeois class

Madeleine (Mad-eh-lenn)—name Valjean assumes when he comes to Montreuil-sur-Mer.

Petit Gervais—a twelve-year-old boy from whom Valjean steals a coin

Colonel Georges Pontmercy (Zhorzh Pohn-mair-see)—Marius’s father, a courageous officer of Napoléon’s who grudgingly allows Marius’s grandfather to bring up his son

Félix Tholomyès (Thol-o-mee-es)—College student in Paris who abandons Fantine after getting her pregnant

Places

Digne (Din-yay)—town in French Alps where Valjean meets the bishop

Montfermeil (Moan-fer-may)—town where the Thénardiers and Cosette live

Montreuil-sur-Mer (Mon-twee-soor-Mair)—town where Valjean assumes the name "Madeleine" and begins anew

Petit-Picpus (Pet-teet-pic-poo)—convent in Paris where Valjean and Cosette live

Toulon (Too-lohn)—prison on south coast of France where Valjean spends nineteen years

Author's Note

The first question you ask yourself when beginning the challenge of conveying the life lessons of *Les Misérables* is: "*Really?* You couldn't have chosen a less complex story, one not based on a book whose unabridged Signet paperback edition stretches to 1,463 pages?"

"*Les Misérables* etches Hugo's view of the world so deeply in the mind that it is impossible to be the same person after reading it," writes Graham Robb in *Victor Hugo: A Biography. "*[And] not just because it takes a noticeable percentage of one's life to read it."[1]

The second question—assuming you've considered the first and, as I do, believe the richness of the story outweighs the task of plowing through a brick-thick book—is: "On what will you base such lessons?"

Should you base them on Victor Hugo's 1862 work, considered by many to be the greatest social novel of all time? On the musical, the world's longest running, and seen by more than sixty-five million people in forty-two countries? Or on the more than thirty movie versions, the latest of which, 2012, garnered eight Academy Award nominations and won a Golden Globe award for best picture?

If, over a century and a half, *Les Misérables* has evolved into something of an artistic trinity, it would seem appropriate to respect it as such. Although Hugo's original story will be the foundation on which I build, each of the three incarnations is unique and worthy on its own. Taken as a whole, they provide a grand expression of how Hugo himself described his story: "a progress from evil to good, from injustice to justice, from falsehood to truth, from night to day, from appetite to conscience, from corruption to life; from bestiality to duty, from hell to heaven, from nothingness to God."[2]

To read Hugo's words is to see the brushstrokes of an artist creating a literary masterpiece; to watch the musical, first done in 1980 in Paris, is to not only hear and see *Les Miz,* but *feel* it as if you're sitting in an emotional wind tunnel; and, finally, to watch the 2012 movie is not only to surprise yourself at having loved an entire *sung-through* movie, but also to marvel at the fascinating blend of nineteenth-century France and twenty-first century moviemaking technology.

As these three streams tumble down through time, the inspirational lake they create can speak to us all. Writes Hugo: "I don't know whether it will be read by everyone, but it is meant for everyone . . . Social problems go beyond frontiers. Humankind's wounds, those huge sores that litter the world, do not stop at the blue and red lines drawn on maps. Wherever men go in ignorance or despair, wherever women sell themselves for bread, wherever children lack a book to learn from or a warm hearth, *Les Misérables* knocks at the door and says: 'open up, I am here for you.'"[3]

I analyze Hugo's work not as a *Les Misérables* expert but as a fellow life traveler smitten with the story and as a firm believer that one of the gifts of great literature, theater, and movies is self-discovery. The question shouldn't be only, what did the story

say about France back then? but, what can it say to me where I am right now?

I came to love *Les Miz* late, not as a decades-long fan or drama critic but as a journalist and author fascinated by the twining of life and faith, having written, among sixteen other books, *52 Little Lessons from It's a Wonderful Life*.

My scope of seeing theatrical presentations of *Les Misérables* ranges from a world-tour show spearheaded by original producer Cameron Mackintosh in Vancouver, British Columbia's three-thousand-seat Queen Elizabeth Theatre to a dinner-theater presentation by Actors Cabaret in Eugene, Oregon, so intimate that, en route to a preshow potty break, I ran into a few Toulon prisoners and a French soldier in the hallway. Soon I found myself watching 1935, 1952, and 1999 movie versions of *Les Misérables.* I watched and re-watched the 2012 movie, the songs replaying in my mind as if I were a bus, and Valjean, Javert, and the rest of the cast were riders who refused to get off.

Though Hugo was religiously eclectic and, like us all, morally flawed, his book is undeniably spiritually seasoned with death and resurrection, law and grace, wrongdoing and redemption. In short, it is seasoned with God stuff, the contemplation of which Hugo himself applauds in the book, offering a gentle rebuke to those who display "the haughty air of superiority and compassion assumed toward the philosophy that sees God . . . It makes one think of a mole exclaiming, 'How I pity them with their sun.'"[4]

So powerful is *Les Misérables* that actors in the musical have found themselves changed by being part of it. Israeli singer David Fisher, who played Valjean, said, "I know that God was standing over (Alain) Boublil and (Claude-Michel) Schönberg when they wrote the piece. There's no doubt in my mind about that."[5]

Geronio Rauch, an Argentine Catholic who played Valjean, talked of how Hugo's character begins the story almost as if he's an animal. "And then he starts a journey, a Christian journey, the same journey as Jesus but without the same fateful death. I find myself crossing myself on the stage and, when I do, I'm praying inside. I'm saying, 'Father, Son, Holy Spirit.'"[6]

When Hugo's book reached America in 1862, Boston's *Atlantic Monthly* was critical of it, in part because it found *Les Misérables* "abstractly Christian."[7] If it is now universally loved by the public, might some of that affection relate to that very reason—to the story's God-shaped, grace-based undertones?

The life lessons that follow, then, are spiritually inclined because *Les Misérables* is undoubtedly spiritually inclined, a story richly leavened with sustenance for the soul. Regardless of the vast differences we bring to the table as readers of books and searchers for meaning, we're bound by a common need to be nourished by the things that matter.

And that, above all, is what *Les Misérables* is all about.

Lesson 4

Every personal encounter matters

I am in this world to care not for my life, but for souls.[1]

—Monseigneur Myriel, the bishop of Digne

Les Misérables pivots on a single act of kindness shown by Monseigneur Myriel. It changes the life of Jean Valjean. Above all, it reminds us that a single act of kindness

can last a lifetime—and beyond.

When the just-released-from-prison Valjean shows up at the bishop's door one night, the two men have little in common. At age forty-four, Valjean has been a slave to injustice, cruelty, and coldhearted men. Prison has left him nearly as much animal as man. He is branded as a convict—literally (No. 24,601[2]) and figuratively—and his newfound freedom promises little hope.

At age seventy-five, Myriel has voluntarily chosen to eschew privilege to serve others less fortunate. Thus, when he welcomes Valjean into his home and offers him food, wine, warmth, and a bed, it is nothing extraordinary for him. In his eyes, the extraordinary thing here is the stranger.

The bishop welcomes Valjean unconditionally. "Come in," he says, not even waiting to see who is at the door, a sign of unconditional acceptance. He not only listens to Valjean divulge his life as an ex-con, but, when Jean finishes, turns to his servant and says, "Madame Magloire, another place please."[3]

When Valjean himself warns that his papers point out he is "highly dangerous"—he'd never cut it as a door-to-door salesman—and asks if there's a stable in which he might sleep, the bishop again turns to his servant. "Madame Magloire," he says, "put some sheets on the bed in the alcove."[4]

The bishop looks at this man and sees not his past but his future, not an ex-prisoner but promise. He looks at this encounter not as a threat or inconvenience but as an honor. "Madame Magloire, set the places as near the fire as you can," he instructs, then, turning to Valjean, says "You must be cold, monsieur."[5]

Madame Magloire, on the other hand, sees Valjean with suspicion at best. Earlier, at the

market, she has heard of an “evil-looking runaway . . . lurking somewhere in town.”[6] It’s no accident she has not placed the silverware and candlesticks on the table.

But the bishop believes in Valjean as redeemable. After the freed man expresses wonder that the bishop would welcome a former convict into his house, Myriel says: “This is not my house; it is Christ’s . . . You are suffering; you are hungry and thirsty; you are welcome.” And later, in a paraphrasing of Luke 15:7, says: “There will be more joy in heaven over the tears of a repentant sinner than over the white robes of a hundred just men.”[7]

That said, the ultimate test of the man’s concern for this stranger comes in the morning, after the police have caught Valjean leaving the village with the bishop’s silverware. Why hadn’t Valjean taken the candlesticks too? he asks in front of the police. After all, says Myriel, they had been given to him as gifts along with the silverware and dishes.

The police are dumbfounded; Jean Valjean more so. In a life of darkness, he has never experienced such light. And this single act of kindness will, in time, change him forever. Will, in essence, turn him into an honest man. Will, indirectly, save Cosette, Marius, and many others.

Why? Because one man—Monseigneur Charles Francois-Bienvenu Myriel—refuses to look at another man with the scorn that others had, that his own servant had.

His example begs a question that too many of us—myself included—hesitate to ask ourselves: Would I do the same?

I think of too many encounters when, with subtle self-righteousness, I’ve assumed the worst of others. When I’ve played the part of the servant and, instead of considering a stranger’s needs, considered my candlesticks and silverware—the operative word being

my. When I've thought the encounter an inconvenience instead of an honor. When I've smugly considered that this is *my* house, not Christ's. When I've ignored the wisdom of Hebrews 13:2 that the bishop understood so well:

> Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.

Lesson 13

We need to see people as God sees people

For prying into other people's affairs, none are equal to those of whom it is no concern.[1]
—*Les Misérables*

In the bead factory, a coworker steals a letter of Fantine's from the Thénardiers regarding Cosette. Word spreads. The young woman has had a child out of wedlock, which whips her fellow workers into anti-Fantine fervor. Whatever their motive—jealousy, pride, something to forget their own sad lives—the other women at the factory peck at Fantine like crows thrown crumbs of bread. "A sad thing," writes Hugo.[2]
They milk the "bastard child" gossip for all it is worth. In the musical, the uproar turns into a physical tussle between Fantine and the unspoken leader of the gossip birds. In the 2012 movie version, Madeleine intervenes, telling his foreman to handle it—and to "be as patient as you can."[3] Moments later, the foreman throws Fantine into the street, a convenient way for him to vent his frustration at her deflecting implied sexual advances.
If the book version lacks the emotion of the musical scene, Fantine is, in Hugo's

version, nevertheless fired on the spot for having a child out of wedlock.

Which makes Madeleine's defense of Fantine in a subsequent incident seem all the more remarkable. On the street, Fantine has a run-in with Bamatabois, a Tholomyès-like man who preys on her weakness. When Bamatabois's taunts become physical—he throws snow down her back—she lashes back at him. Javert, the police inspector, arrives on the scene and—who needs a judge or jury?—tells her she's headed for six months in jail.

Enter Monsieur Madeleine, who sees her as less troublemaker than victim. If her fellow factory workers saw the worst in Fantine, Madeleine sees the best—even after she thanks him for intervening by spitting in Madeleine's face, convinced that it was his recommendation to the factory foreman that had her fired. But Madeleine doesn't let that deter him. "Set this woman free," he tells Javert.[4]

When, in the book version, she begins telling of the wretched treatment prisoners receive in jail, Madeleine doesn't scold her. He listens. Javert does not. When she walks toward the door, Javert says to a sergeant: "Don't you see that this tramp is escaping . . . this wretched woman has insulted a citizen."

Madeleine defends the "wretched woman" and, in so doing, risks offending the town's highly respected police inspector. "I heard everything," he says. "It is the citizen who is in the wrong; it is he who, with proper police work, should have been arrested."[5]

As Javert continues to protest, Madeleine cites his mayoral authority in such matters and tells Fantine, "You may go."[6] As with animals who've been caged for a long time, she is loath to leave. Dazed. Not unlike Jean Valjean when the bishop sets him free, for Fantine, like him, has never known human grace until this moment. She's like a coal

miner trapped beneath the earth who sees the sky again, initially blinded by the light. "Before her eyes she had seen a struggle between two men who held in their hands her liberty, her life, her soul, her child," writes Hugo. "One of these men was drawing her to the side of darkness, the other was leading her toward the light."[7]

When the two are alone, Madeleine tells Fantine he did not know she had been fired. He insists he will pay her debts. He tells her he will care for her and her child, Cosette. "I do not doubt it," he says, "that you have never ceased to be virtuous and holy before God. Poor woman."[8]

Again, the similarities are telling between the bishop seeing the promise in Jean Valjean and the ex-convict seeing the promise in Fantine, as if the latter incident has been born of the former. Madeleine's seeing of the good in Fantine only underscores how quickly her fellow factory workers were to see the worst. Though we might wish otherwise, sometimes we play the part of Fantine's fellow factory workers. "The average Christian," writes Oswald Chambers, "is the most penetratingly critical individual."[9]

Madeleine intervenes in a volatile situation and brings peace. The factory workers turn a peaceful atmosphere into one of contention, all for the thrill of stirring up trouble. "Without wood a fire goes out; without a gossip a quarrel dies down," says Proverbs 26. "As charcoal to embers and as wood to fire, so is a quarrelsome person for kindling strife. The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down to the inmost parts" (vv. 20–22).

And words of praise? "Sociologists have a theory of the looking-glass self," writes Philip Yancey in *What's So Amazing About Grace?* "You become what the most important person in your life (wife, father, boss, etc.) thinks you are. How would my life change if I

truly believed the Bible's astounding words about God's love for me, if I looked in the mirror and saw what God sees?"[10]

Likewise, how would our lives change if we saw others as God sees them? "Here lies hidden the great call to conversion," writes Nouwen. "To look not with the eyes of my own low self-esteem, but with the eyes of God's love."[11]

We need to see others not through our egocentric filters, but through the same God-centered perspective that allowed the bishop to see the potential in Jean Valjean and Valjean the potential in Fantine.

Lesson 24

Don't rush to judgment

It is ourselves we have to fear. Prejudice is the real robber, and vice the real murderer.

—*Les Misérables*

Hugo is fairly harsh with his criticism of the nuns in the convent, perhaps one of the reasons the Vatican banned the book. And it may well have reflected the reality of such places in nineteenth-century France. But if his assumption is that all nuns are sour, inward-focused women who are spiritually suffocating from legalistic constraints, such an assessment strikes of unwarranted narrowness.

To assume we can paint an entire group of people with the same brush is to take the easy way out instead of getting to know people within a particular group. To believe in one-size-fits-all thinking is to set yourself up to be a victim of the same, should others do likewise about a group of which you're part.

“Do not judge, or you too will not be judged,” says Matthew. “For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you” (7:1–2).

Better to acknowledge that everyone–me, you, Hugo among them—has biases. And dare to see beyond them.

When a racial incident divided our community years ago, I didn’t just pontificate about who was right and who was wrong; everyone was doing that. I enrolled in a community college multicultural class, which was enlightening and a tad guilt-producing because of the light it shined on some of what I realized were my own subtle biases.

I also found myself going back to a story I wrote for my high school paper about an exchange program that our nearly all-white high school had had with a predominantly black high school. I remember how many people from that high school charged that I had been unfair in my contrast. No way, I told myself at the time, reassured by an adviser and colleagues who agreed.

But with nearly four decades of insight, I reread that story. The students and faculty from the other school were right. My story had been unfair. The biases I couldn’t see at the time had clouded my perspective. Acknowledging such doesn’t preclude me from making that same mistake again, but it does heighten my awareness to how easily we can lump people together with one of those “If-you’re-[fill in the blank]-then-you-must-be-[fill in the blank]” judgments.

Says James 2:1–4: “ My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism. Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in filthy old clothes also comes in. If you show special

attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, ‘Here’s a good seat for you,’ but say to the poor man, ‘You stand there’ or ‘Sit on the floor by my feet,’ have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?”

As I was reading *Les Misérables,* in particular the chapters about Hugo and his harsh criticism of the convent, I was also writing about a local nun for my newspaper column, a woman who was celebrating fifty years since taking her vows with the order that founded our community’s largest hospital.

A member of the hospital’s board referred to a quote from Mother Teresa in describing the honoree: “[She] once said, ‘It is not how much we do, but how much love we put in the doing.’ That’s Sister Aileen.”[1]

It is, said some, as if she sees people with CAT scan vision, beyond the obvious, to discover how they’re hurting and how she can help. “She’s the consummate listener,” said the hospital’s CEO. “Steadfast in prayer . . . steadfast in humor—and an occasional prank.”

Sister Aileen had been known to tap-dance in the hallways, show up in a clown’s suit, or distract an audience by swirling a laser pointer behind a speaker’s head. And yet for all her humor, it was the serious way in which she valued others that shone brightest in her half century of service: Showing up in the middle of the night to comfort grieving families. Leading morning prayers at the hospital. Fighting for a neonatal unit back in the 1980s even though it looked as if it were a financial bridge too far.

“Because of her support then, and the support of the other sisters, the last three decades have seen thousands of babies saved who would otherwise have languished or been sent away,” said the hospital’s chief of medicine.

As I contrasted this with Hugo's harshness toward the nuns in the convent, it was a gentle reminder for me: Don't lump individuals together and stamp your approval or disapproval on them. That may be easy but can lead to misjudgments and missing the human wonders among us.

Lesson 47

Religion isn't the answer

He did not study God; he was dazzled by Him.[1]

—*Les Misérables*

Hugo describes Jean Valjean in many ways. "Religious" is not one of them. He is true to his word. He is honest. He brims with integrity. He gives to others. But he isn't religious. Likewise with the bishop, for whom the stereotype "religious" might seem an obvious fit. He wasn't empowered by some sort of organized set of spiritual beliefs, but by the absolute passion to mirror the grace of God to all he met. That said, I don't think of him as particularly "religious."

Neither was Jesus. People too often think of Jesus and think of rules and regulations. Of right and wrong. No, these are the things of Inspector Javert, the heartless things, the Pharisee-cherished, nose-in-the-air, good-deeds stuff. Jesus was never about such things. He was about heart change, about allowing the Holy Spirit to work through us as yeast leavens bread, so every fiber in our being is about not pompously being religious, but about humbly serving others to bring glory to Him.

Not about rules, but about relationships. Not about self-righteousness, but about

admission of our unworthiness. Not about "team pride"—"We've got Jesus, yes we do; we've got Jesus, how 'bout you?"—but about personal repentance. And isn't that what made Jean Valjean the man he was? It wasn't his "things-I-avoid" list or his politics or any smug bumper stickers he might have slapped on his carriage.

"Many a soul begins to come to God when he flings off being religious, because there is only one Master of the human heart, and that is not religion but Jesus Christ," writes Chambers.[2]

In Luke 18:10–14, Jesus tells the parable about the Pharisee and the tax collector. In the culture of the day, the Pharisee was religion personified, the tax collector quite the opposite.

> Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: "God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get." But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner." I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.

Jesus never exalted the religious. He exalted the real. The repentant. Like Valjean, the ragamuffins who had hearts for heaven.

Notes

Author's Note

1. Graham Robb, *Victor Hugo: A Biography* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999), 379.

2. Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*, trans., Frederick Charles Lascelles Wraxall, vol. 3 (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1862), 219.
3. Edward Behr, *The Complete Book of Les Misérables* (n.p.: Arcade, 1993), 39–42.
4. Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables: A New Unabridged Translation*, Signet Classics reissue, trans. Lee Fahnestock, Norman MacAfee, and Charles Edwin Wilbour (New York: Penguin, 1987), 518. (Hereinafter Hugo, *Les Misérables: A New Unabridged Translation*.)
5. Nightingale, Benedict and Palmer, Martyn. *Les Misérables: From Stage to Screen* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Applause Theatre & Cinema Books, 2013), 37.
6. Ibid., 37.
7. Edwin Percy Whipple, "*Fantine,* by Victor Hugo: A review by Edwin Percy Whipple," *Atlantic Monthly*, July 1862, available at http://www.theatlantic.com/past/docs/unbound/classrev/lesmisfa.htm.

Lesson 4
1. Hugo, *Les Misérables: A New Unabridged Translation*, 26.
2. Ibid., 85.
3. Ibid., 74.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid., 76.
6. Ibid., 71.
7. Ibid., 76, 77.

Lesson 13
1. Hugo, *Les Misérables: A New Unabridged Translation*, 178.
2. Ibid.
3. "At the End of the Day," from *Les Misérables* (musical), music by Claude-Michel Schönberg, English lyrics by Herbert Kretzmer, French lyrics by Alain Boublil.
4. Hugo, *Les Misérables: A New Unabridged Translation*, 194.
5. Ibid., 197.
6. Ibid., 198.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid., 199.
9. Oswald Chambers, "The Uncritical Temper," My Utmost for His Highest website, June 17, 2013, http://utmost.org/classic/the-uncritical-temper-classic/.
10. Philip Yancey, *What's So Amazing About Grace?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008).
11. Henri H. M. Nouwen, *The Return of the Prodigal Son: A Story of Homecoming*, reissue ed. (New York: Image Books/Doubleday, 1994),105.

Lesson 24
1. All quotes in this lesson are from the article "What Would Sister Aileen Do?" from the *Register-Guard* (Eugene, OR), June 20, 2013, http://www.registerguard.com/rg/news/local/30095925-152/sister-aileen-welch-beymer-peacehealth.html.csp; no longer accessible.

Lesson 47

1. Hugo, *Les Misérables: A New Unabridged Translation*, 55.
2. Oswald Chambers, "The Mystery of Believing" (sermon), sermonindex.net, accessed November 5, 2013, http://www.sermonindex.net/modules/newbb/viewtopic.php?topic_id=34437&forum=45&0.

Book Club Questions

1. If you could choose one of the fifty-two lessons that hit home with you, which would it be, and why?

2. Have you ever, in a sense, had a stranger metaphorically "knock on your door" as the bishop did with Jean Valjean? How did you react and why? Would you do the same if the opportunity presented itself again?

3. Of the characters in Victor Hugo's novel, whom do you relate to most and why?

4. How were Jean Valjean and Javert similar? Different?

5. Hugo writes about how people "confuse heaven's radiant stars with a duck's footprint left in the mud."[1] In what ways do we do that?

6. Welch asserts that "crisis reveals character." Why and how?

7. Who emerged as your personal hero in *Les Misérables*? Who did you despise?

8. In what ways do you believe nineteenth-century France and twenty-first century America are culturally similar? Different? What can we learn from the historical past?

9. If you could immerse yourself in only one version of *Les Misérables,* which would it be: the book, the musical, or one of the many movies? Why?

10. Choose someone in your life who resembles one of the characters from *Les Misérables.* What have you learned from this person?

11. In what way does the church today promote values that are aligned with Jean Valjean's? That are aligned with Javert's?

12. What similarities do the rich and poor share?

13. Jean Valjean agonizes over letting go of Cosette. Who or what was difficult for you to let go of? What did you learn from the experience?

14. Name one of the author's lessons of which you're skeptical. Why? What would be a better variation of that lesson?

15. What's your favorite moment in *Les Misérables* and why?