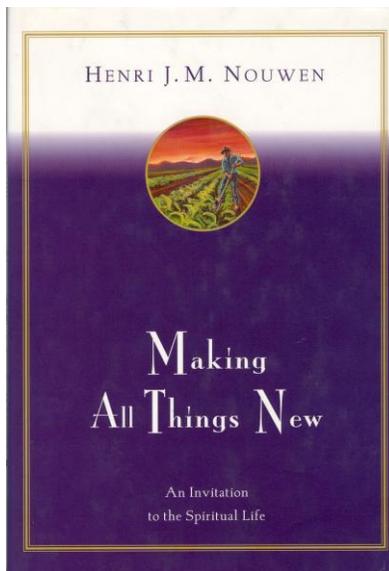


Making All Things New

An Invitation to the Spiritual Life

By **Henri J.M. Nouwen**

Four Week Program



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About Henri Nouwen

The internationally renowned priest and author, respected professor and beloved pastor Henri J.M. Nouwen wrote over 40 books on the spiritual life. He corresponded regularly in English, Dutch, German, French and Spanish with hundreds of friends and reached out to thousands through his Eucharistic celebrations, lectures and retreats. Since his death in 1996, ever-increasing numbers of readers, writers, teachers and seekers have been guided by his literary legacy. Nouwen's books have sold over 2 million copies and been published in over 22 languages.

Born in Nijkerk, Holland, on January 24, 1932, Nouwen felt called to the priesthood at a very young age. He was ordained in 1957 as a diocesan priest and studied psychology at the Catholic University of Nijmegen. In 1964 he moved to the United States to study at the Menninger Clinic. He went on to teach at the University of Notre Dame, and the Divinity Schools of Yale and Harvard. For several months during the 1970s, Nouwen lived and worked with the Trappist monks in the Abbey of the Genesee, and in the early 1980s he lived with the poor in Peru. In 1985 he was called to join L'Arche in Trosly, France, the first of over 100 communities founded by Jean Vanier where people with developmental disabilities live with assistants. A year later Nouwen came to make his home at L'Arche Daybreak near Toronto, Canada. He died suddenly on September 21st, 1996, in Holland and is buried in King City, Ontario, not far from the Daybreak Community.

Nouwen believed that what is most personal is most universal. He wrote, "By giving words to these intimate experiences I can make my life available to others." His spirit lives on in the work of the Henri Nouwen Society, Henri Nouwen Stichting (Holland), the Henri Nouwen Legacy Trust, the Henri J. M. Nouwen Archives and Research Collection, and in all who live the spiritual values of solitude, community and ministry, to which he dedicated his life.

For more information about Henri Nouwen, his writing and the work of the Henri Nouwen Society visit: www.HenriNouwen.org.

¹ Photo of children with Henri in Guatemala by Peter Weiskel. Used with permission.

² Henri Nouwen in Ukraine.

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Discussion Questions for Nouwen Reading Groups

Prepared by Steve E. Berry and Claire Merritt
Recommended number of meetings for this book: 4

Meeting #1: Introduction pp. 13-17

Read together the **Introduction** pp. 13-17 and then come back to the discussion.

Henri introduces his theme by inviting us to explore what it means to live a spiritual life. He writes that he has written the book for those who wish to enter more deeply into the spiritual life but are not quite sure how to do so.

For the discussion leader: Begin by introducing yourself and speaking a little about your spiritual journey. How has the story of Christ shaped your journey? Which other stories, if any, have influenced your spirituality?

Discussion Questions—Meeting 1

1. Henri directs his book both to men and women “who ‘know’ the story of Christ” (p. 14) and also to those “for whom the Christian story is unfamiliar or strange but who experience a general desire for spiritual freedom” (pp. 14-15). Henri says that the authentic spiritual life finds its basis in the human condition shared by all people. Discuss what this means. What do you see as the basic things that all humans share?
2. Henri’s point of departure is Jesus’ words “Do not worry.” What do you worry about? How might worry act as an impediment to the spiritual life?
3. As you begin this reading group, ask yourself what you imagine Jesus means when he points us to the “unrealistic” possibility of a life without worries.

Assignment for Meeting 2- read Chapter 1, “All These Other Things” and be prepared to discuss.

Notes

Discussion Questions—Meeting 2

Introduction

1. In Henri's introduction to Chapter 1 on the spiritual life he suggests that we may feel vaguely discontent and have a mood of resignation that prevents us from actively searching for the life of the Spirit. How do you feel about your present life? What do you long for spiritually?
2. Henri states that we must look at ourselves critically when evaluating our discontent, and unmask our self-deceptive games. He says this "will lead us not to despair, but to a new heaven and a new earth" (p. 22). What do you think he means?

Filled

3. Our lives are hectic and often filled and over-packed. Henri says we are filled but unfulfilled. What activities keep you busy and perhaps busier than you want to be?
4. Do your activities give you pleasure or are they a source of anxiety?
5. What are some of your preoccupations and how might they negatively influence your spiritual life?
6. One of the most powerful statements Henri makes is that "We are indeed caught in a web of false expectations and contrived needs" (p. 28). Explain what that statement means to you. What role does worry play in this?

Unfulfilled

7. Henri reflects that boredom, resentment, and depression are the result of being unfulfilled. What role have these feelings played in your life? Henri describes boredom, resentment and depression, all of which are signs of disconnectedness. To what extent have you experienced any of these sentiments? Where do you see them in our society?
8. Henri states that "disconnectedness is experienced as loneliness" (p. 32). When do you feel lonely? From what do you feel disconnected at these times?
9. Henri writes, "Our urge to be set free from this isolation can become so strong that it bursts forth in violence" (p. 34). To what extent does this observation shed light on the violence that is rampant in our world?

Conclusion

“Jesus responds to this condition of being filled yet unfulfilled...” (p. 37). What does Jesus say? Quote scripture and discuss.

Assignment for Meeting #3- read Chapter 2, “His Kingdom First” and be prepared to discuss.

Meeting #3 - His Kingdom First (pp. 41-62)

In the previous meeting we heard the words of Jesus, “Do not worry...set your hearts on God’s kingdom first...and all these other things will be given you as well.” (Matthew 6:31-33)

Discussion Questions—Meeting #3

Introduction

1. Jesus does not speak about change of activities, contacts or pace. He speaks about a change of heart. What does it mean to have a change of heart and how is this different from other changes we might make in our lives?
2. Jesus asks us to move our hearts to the center. What, asks Henri, is this center? What is your center? What is Jesus’ center? What is the life of the Spirit?

Jesus Life

3. Henri states that Jesus’ life was very busy. He uses Mark 1:32-39 to make his case. But Henri says that amid all the activity Jesus was focused on only one thing. What was it?
4. Jesus single-minded obedience to God teaches us something about the spiritual life. What can we begin to discern?
5. Discuss the word “obedience.” What are your associations, both positive and negative, to this word?
6. How is obedience, as we have come to regard the word, different from obedience described in Jesus’ relationship(s)?
7. What does obedience have to do with love as Henri describes it?
8. Obedience experienced as listening in love is the goal of Jesus’ ministry. How is that so?

Our Lives

9. Henri says, “Our lives are destined to become like the life of Jesus” (p. 50). Why might we be surprised by this statement? How can our lives become like that of Jesus?
10. “Jesus wants us to be where he is” (pp. 51-52). Where is that?
11. Henri references the apostle Paul and says, “Jesus did not cling to his equality with God, but emptied himself and became as we are so we might become like Him and thus share in His divine life” (pp. 52-53). Explain what this might mean personally.
12. The Holy Spirit is in the Spirit of Truth. “Jesus sends the Spirit so that we may be led to the full truth of the divine life” (p. 54). What is the nature of this truth?
13. How does a person enter into the spiritual life and the world at the same time?
14. Is there only one way to live the spiritual life? If not, what is, by Henri’s account, the one standard requirement?

Conclusion

15. “God’s kingdom first,” is the focus Henri establishes in this chapter. He concludes by saying that, “it is important that we gradually realize where we are and learn how we can let the life of God’s Spirit grow strong in us” (p. 62). What insights can you share on this maxim?

Assignment for meeting # 4 – read Chapter 3, “Set Your Hearts,” and be prepared to discuss.

Notes

Meeting # 4 – Set Your Hearts (pp. 65-95)

In the last meeting we focused more on Jesus and God's Kingdom. In this chapter we hear Henri describe the main disciplines that can support us under the Spirit's guidance.

Discussion Questions—Meeting # 4

Introduction

1. The spiritual life is a gift of the Holy Spirit that requires human effort. Henri says that the spiritual life without discipline is impossible. Why is it impossible?
2. What does Henri say we need to become attracted to and why?
3. Why is a spiritual discipline necessary?

Solitude

5. Why is spiritual life virtually impossible without solitude?
6. What does Henri say about outer distractions and inner distractions?
7. Why is it sometimes difficult being alone?
8. What is solitude? Why does Henri feel it is essential for our spiritual life? Why is it so difficult as a discipline?
9. What can solitude offer us? How can it help us? What role can scripture play in our solitude?
10. What are some of the attractive practices of solitude we can engage in?
11. How will solitude benefit us?

Community

12. Describe the discipline of community. What does Henri say about it? What does he say is true community?
13. Henri says community has little to do with mutual compatibility. Why?
14. What does Henri mean when he speaks about listening together? What is the value of such an exercise?
15. Henri says that "listening together to the word can free us from our competition and rivalry and allow us to recognize our true identity as sons and daughters of the same loving God" (p. 86). To what extent have you experienced this kind of listening in your faith community?

16. “Community,” says Henri, “is obedience practiced together” (p. 87). Why is community an essential part of obedience?
17. Henri connects solitude and community and states that they are qualities of the heart. How does Henri enlarge the concept of community beyond the physical group of people we are with?
18. What in Henri’s estimation is the real Pentecost experience? Do you think such an experience is possible for people today? Is it possible for you?

Conclusion

19. Henri says that solitude and community belong together “because the space within us and the space among us are the same space” (p. 90). What unites these two spaces? How can this insight bring us closer to God and to others?

Finally

20. Reflect on Henri’s original questions, “What does it mean to live a spiritual life?” and “How do we live it?”
21. What insights can lead you further into your spiritual journey in a helpful way?
22. What can you do with the spiritual disciplines of solitude and community?
23. How can you and others design steps that might help and support each other?
24. How can your hunger for God be realized better and what can you do to fill that hunger?

Notes

Nouwen Reading Group

Book: _____

Group Members:

Name	Phone Number	E-mail

Leadership tasks that could be shared within your group:

Date of meeting	Prayer/song and check-in with each other	Video or DVD segments: <i>Journey of the Heart</i>	Reader: themes, questions, text passages	Discussion leader	Refreshments



Nouwen Reading Groups Feedback Form

Thank you for your interest in Nouwen Reading Groups! We would be most appreciative if you could take a few minutes at the end of your last meeting to complete this feedback form and send to our office in the United States or Canada. We are eager to hear about your experience in the group and about the materials prepared by the Henri Nouwen Society. We continue to learn as we go along and with your help, we hope to improve and expand our offerings. Blessings!

1. Why did you decide to start/join a Nouwen reading group? (check as many as are appropriate for you)

- Enjoy discussing books Interested in discussions of a spiritual nature
- Enjoy getting together with friends for any reason Want to meet new people who are interested in spirituality
- Nouwen's writing resonates with me
- Did not know Nouwen's work but was interested Other: _____

2. How did you invite people to join your reading group/hear about the reading group?

- Spoke with friends/co-workers Notice in church bulletin/newsletter
- Announcement to congregation Other: _____

3. What book did you reflect on? _____

4. Why were you interested in discussing this particular book?

5. How would you evaluate the Henri Nouwen Society reflection guide? (please circle appropriate number)

Not helpful										Extremely helpful
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	

6. How was the reflection guide used?

- Used it as a starting point only Followed it carefully Didn't use it at all

Other comments about the reflection guide: _____

7. Was the Nouwen Reading Group a positive experience for you? Yes No
Why? _____

8. Would you consider leading or joining another Nouwen Reading Group in the future?
 Yes No Maybe

Additional comments welcome: _____

Thank you!

Additional questions for group leader:

9. Where did your group meet? Your home Church hall Library School
Other: _____ City: _____ State/Province: _____

10. How often did your group meet? Once a week Bi-weekly Monthly
Other: _____ Duration of meeting: _____ hours

11. Your group met from (month) _____ (year) _____ to (month) _____ (year) _____

12. How many people were in the group at the beginning? _____ At the end? _____

13. What occurred during your first meeting?

Prayer Fellowship Invited others to take on some leadership roles (ex. introduction to a chapter; organize refreshments, prayer, etc.) Viewed “Journey of the Heart: the life of Henri Nouwen” film Discussion based on reflection guide
 Other: _____

Additional comments welcome: _____

Please return completed forms to Maureen Wright at the Henri Nouwen Society:
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In the USA — P.O. Box 220522, St. Louis, MO 63122-0522