

“A Living Gospel: Reading God’s Story in Holy Lives”

Featuring Robert Ellsberg



A Week of Reflection | Session 4: Henri Nouwen

Day 1:

Henri Nouwen was a spiritual explorer whose journey was marked by his struggle with a deep restlessness. For Henri, this restlessness related to a search for an experience of home, an experience of intimacy with God and others, and a connection to his true vocation.

How have you experienced restlessness in your spiritual journey? In what ways has restlessness moved you forward? In what ways has restlessness been a distraction? What have you learned from experiences of restlessness?

Day 2:

Henri Nouwen became a well-known speaker and author and his popularity was only enhanced by his willingness to share his own struggles and brokenness. Henri did not present himself as a “spiritual master,” but as a “wounded healer.”

It isn’t easy to be open and vulnerable about our struggles. Think of a time when you sensed God’s presence when sharing your hurts with someone you trusted. Is this a regular practice for you? If so, how have you experienced healing through this practice? If not, who might be someone you could trust to share your brokenness with?



Day 3:

Henri suffered a breakdown which led to months of anguish including questions and doubts about God. After months of care and intensive therapy, Henri was able to write, ***"I now know that while I felt completely abandoned, God didn't leave me alone."*** He identified God's presence as 'the inner voice of love.'

It is often the case that deep pain reveals deep love. In what times in your life have you experienced this to be true? What practices have you found keep you most connected to that 'inner voice of love'? What keeps you from engaging these practices? How will you bring this God?

Day 4:

In his journal, when contemplating his death, Henri wrote, ***"Every day should be well lived. What a simple truth! Still, it is worth my attention. Did I offer peace today? Did I bring a smile to someone's face? Did I say words of healing? Did I let go of my anger and resentments? Did I forgive? Did I love?"***

How will you take Henri's questions and make them your own? Think of some key situations in which these questions hit home for you. What are your next best steps?



Day 5:

After a near-death experience Henri wrote, ***“Death lost its power and shrank away in the Life and Love that surrounded me in such an intimate way, as if I were walking through a sea whose waves were rolled away. I was being held safe while moving toward the other shore. All jealousies, resentments, and angers were being gently moved away, and I was being shown that Love and Life are greater, deeper, and stronger than any of the forces I had been worrying about.”***

How have you made space to reflect on your death? Where do you feel peace and where are there matters that seem unresolved? How will you attend to unfinished business? In what ways does death hold power for you? How will you bring this to God?

Day 6:

One of the most transforming insights Henri shared with the world came into sharp focus after the death of Adam, the severely handicapped man that Henri cared for at Daybreak. ***“He was a person who, by his very life, announced the marvelous mystery of our God: I am precious, beloved, whole, and born of God. Adam bore silent witness to this mystery, which has nothing to do with whether or not he could speak, walk, or express himself . . . It has to do with his being. He was and is a beloved child of God.”***

How have you been able to internalize this deep truth, that you are Beloved? What are the things that get in the way of remaining connected to this reality? How will you bring that to God?
