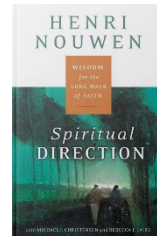


Henri Nouwen Book Club

Spiritual Direction: Wisdom for the Long Walk of Faith

September 15, 7pm Eastern



Part 1: Look Within to the Heart

We encourage all participants to share openly, at whatever level feels comfortable. You're always welcome to pass on a question and revisit it later during personal reflection or journaling. To honor our time together and ensure everyone has a chance to contribute, please keep your responses focused and concise. Thoughtful preparation before the group discussion will help create a meaningful and engaging conversation for all.

1. Have you received or offered spiritual direction before? What was the highlight of that experience?
2. *"For Henri, a spiritual director simply was someone who talks to you and prays with you about your life."* In what ways did reading the book feel like Henri Nouwen was offering you spiritual direction? If you aren't currently receiving spiritual direction, has reading the book inspired you to seek out someone to be an intentional spiritual companion for you? Take time this week to write down the names of 2-3 people you could approach.
3. What are your biggest challenges in creating sacred space in your life?
4. If someone were to ask you, "How is your prayer life?" what would be the first *emotion* you would feel? Does this emotion act as an invitation or a barrier?
5. What question(s) might God be inviting you to live in this chapter of your life? How have those questions changed over the course of your spiritual journey?
6. Are you able to be "comfortable with unknowing"? What helps you to remain in a posture of listening, even in the face of unanswerable questions?
7. *"The quest for meaning can be extremely frustrating and at times even excruciating, precisely because it does not lead to ready answers but to new questions. When we realize that the pain of the human search is a necessary growing pain, we can accept as good the forces of human spiritual development and be grateful for the journey on the long walk of faith."* (p.9) Think of a time when you felt the kind of frustration that Henri describes. How did you come to a point of learning and growth through this experience?

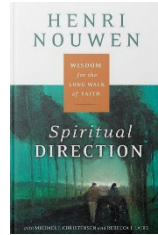
8. *"To listen with obedience to the voice of God requires building up a resistance to all the other voices that compete for our attention."* (p.19) What kind of training might we do to 'build up a resistance' in our 'constantly on' society? How would you describe the kind of motivation that keeps us committed to spiritual training, even when it feels easier to give up and fall back into our busy, distracted routines?
9. Henri invites us to claim our belovedness. If this is something you have practiced before, how has this affected your sense of identity and value? How do you incorporate this practice into your daily life?

Henri Nouwen Book Club

Spiritual Direction: Wisdom for the Long Walk of Faith

September 22, 7pm Eastern

Part 2: Look to God in the Book



HENRI NOUWEN SOCIETY

We encourage all participants to share openly, at whatever level feels comfortable. You're always welcome to pass on a question and revisit it later during personal reflection or journaling. To honor our time together and ensure everyone has a chance to contribute, please keep your responses focused and concise. Thoughtful preparation before the group discussion will help create a meaningful and engaging conversation for all.

1. How has your approach to prayer changed over the course of your life? What have you found helpful in cultivating a posture of prayerfulness?
2. Henri invites us to deeper levels of honesty and vulnerability in our prayer lives. He says, *“Only by expressing our anger and resentment directly to God in prayer will we come to know the fullness of love and freedom.”* (p.59) What were you taught about expressing difficult emotions? How have you experienced bringing your pain into your times of prayer? What has been helpful to you in learning how to do this more fully?
3. Henri describes prayer as a *“simple, intimate conversation with the Lord who loves us.”* (p.60) How have you experienced such dialogue? How have you learned to trust that you are hearing God’s voice? What is that experience like for you? (Example: Hearing God through words of scripture coming to mind; sensing God’s voice through pictures that come into your imagination; hearing God through your intuition; hearing God while walking in nature; hearing God through the wisdom of a friend....)
4. Henri encourages us to *“set aside a definite time, a special place, and a single focus”* for our prayer life. How do you feel about this invitation? In what ways have you tried to incorporate this in your life? What makes maintaining this kind of discipline challenging? What makes this invitation compelling?
5. On one hand, Henri describes the attempt to focus like a *“banana tree filled with jumping monkeys”* and on the other hand, tells us, *“With practice, you can learn to acknowledge the distractions, choose not to act on them, send them away, and return to your primary purpose, which is prayer.”* (p.67) If you consider your most recent times of prayer, does it feel more like

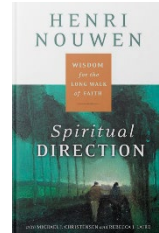
jumping monkeys or *acknowledging, sending away, and returning*? What is one thing that you have found helpful to quiet the jumping monkeys?

6. *"The important thing is faithfulness in prayer."* (p.68) What have you learned about faithfulness? Describe how you have experienced healing or forgiveness or growth in embracing your human limitations while seeking to be faithful.
7. *"The heart is the place where we are most human."* (p.72) What is the essence of your humanness? How in touch do you feel with your own heart? How might you lay your heart bare before God? What might that entail?
8. *"First, God is with us. Second, God is personal. Third, God is hidden. And fourth, God is looking for us."* (p.73, 74) Is there one aspect of God you are more familiar with than others.... Why do you think that is? Is there an aspect of God that you want to draw closer to?
9. Of the four ways of engaging the Word: *Living Word* (Jesus), *written Word* (Scripture), *spoken Word* (rhema), and *written word* (journaling), which way have you relied on most? Do you have any stories of spoken word you would like to share? Are there any new ideas you would like to explore for hearing the Word?

Henri Nouwen Book Club

Spiritual Direction: Wisdom for the Long Walk of Faith

September 29, 7pm Eastern



Part 3: Look to Others in Community

We encourage all participants to share openly, at whatever level feels comfortable. You're always welcome to pass on a question and revisit it later during personal reflection or journaling. To honor our time together and ensure everyone has a chance to contribute, please keep your responses focused and concise. Thoughtful preparation before the group discussion will help create a meaningful and engaging conversation for all.

1. Henri describes a rhythm that begins with solitude/prayer that moves to community and then bears fruit in ministry/service. Often our tendency is to rush into ministry, realize we can't do it by ourselves and seek the help of others, and then when our backs are against the wall we turn in desperation to prayer. How have you experienced the three aspects of this rhythm? How has Henri's teaching helped you to think about your approach to ministry/service?
2. What experiences of community have you had that were joyful? What kinds of challenges have you experienced in community? What have you learned about nurturing community long term?
3. *"Many relationships begin out of a fear of being alone, but they can't ultimately satisfy a need that only solitude with God can fulfill."* (p.114) How have you navigated the movement from loneliness to solitude, and awareness of your belovedness, while in relationship with others?
4. *"If we want other people to give us something that only God can give, we are guilty of idolatry.... Forgiveness means that I continually am willing to forgive the other person for not fulfilling all my needs and desires.....This is what makes community possible, when we can come together in a forgiving and undemanding way."* (p.119) How does Henri's description of forgiveness resonate with you? How might this call us to forgive ourselves too? How do we acknowledge and confess the idolatry we are guilty of and also embrace our belovedness?
5. *"By 'celebrate' I mean to lift up, affirm, confirm, and rejoice in another's gifts and graces as reflections of God's unlimited gift of love and grace."* (p.123,124) Describe a time you felt celebrated in this way. How might you integrate this understanding of celebration into the next occasion for celebration in your family or community?

6. *"You have to trust that if you are the son or daughter of God, a healing power will go out from you and people will be healed. People will want to know where your energy comes from. They will want to touch you to get the overflow."* (p.131) What kind of healing is Henri describing here? How have you experienced this in your own life? Who do you know who exemplifies this kind of energy?
7. *"If you are living in communion with God, if you know you are the beloved, and if you make yourself available for service, you cannot do other than minister."* (p.131) What might this look like in the reality of your day-to-day life? How might this change how you go about your various activities? What practices do you have in place to recognize and remember the opportunities you have had for ministry?
8. In what ways have you experienced mutuality in ministry? Describe a time when you were with others and fruitful ministry emerged from your time together. Are you able to experience shared ministry at this stage of your life? What steps might you take to welcome others into your experiences of service/ministry?
9. *"Questions of identity, purpose, calling, community, and ministry continue to surface with new urgency at different seasons of our lives. Issues of intimacy and sexuality, aging and embodiment, are common to the spiritual life. I urge you, as I remind myself, to live the questions deeply, knowing that you and I are God's beloved."* (p. 151) As you are comfortable, share the questions that are most pressing for you in this season of your life. In what ways are you learning to "trust the catcher" in the midst of these questions? What place does an embodied spirituality have for you in this season?
10. What is the most significant take-away for you from this book? What will you be seeking to incorporate into your life for this season?