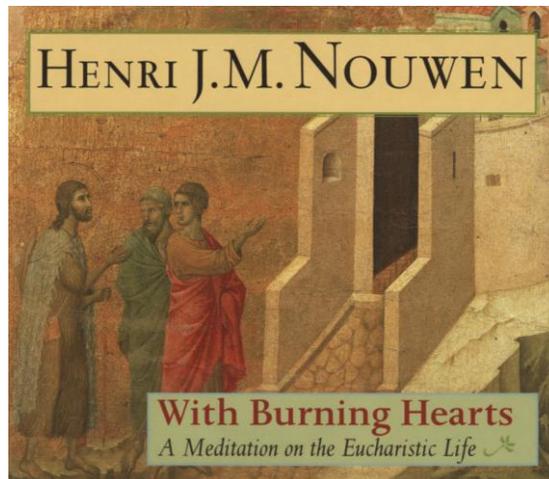


With Burning Hearts

By Henri J.M. Nouwen

Discussion Questions for Nouwen Reading Groups

Five Week Program



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With Burning Hearts

A Meditation on the Eucharistic Life

By Henri J.M. Nouwen

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Discussion Questions for Nouwen Reading Groups

prepared by Claire Merritt

Suggested number of meetings for this book: 5

Meeting #1 (pp. 11-35/9-41)

Introduction

Henri Nouwen reflects on the meaning of the Eucharist. Do you think about the meaning of this sacrament when you participate in it? Share your reflections. What does it mean to you? Has its meaning evolved during your life?

Nouwen asks: “How can all of my life be Eucharistic...?” What does he mean?

I. Mourning Our Losses – “*Lord, Have Mercy*”

When have you felt like the two people on the Road to Emmaus?

Have you ever lost your faith and felt that life had no meaning? Describe your experience.

Why is it essential that we mourn our losses?

Nouwen quotes from the Beatitudes: “Blessed are those who mourn: they shall be comforted.” What blessings might be hidden in our grief?

Nouwen calls resentment “one of the most destructive forces in our lives.” What makes it so destructive?

What is the connection between the Eucharist and gratitude?

What is the significance of the cry for mercy at the beginning of the Eucharist?

Nouwen sees our brokenness as “the bitter fruit of the human choice to say ‘No’ to love.” Discuss this statement.

How can we claim responsibility for conflicts that we didn’t cause directly?

What are the differences between a hardened heart and a contrite heart?

What does Nouwen mean when he says: “But no sin can be faced without some knowledge of grace”?

Meeting #2 (pp. 37-50/44-61)

II. Discerning the Presence – “*This Is the Word of God*”

Nouwen describes in detail the encounter of the two travelers on the Road to Emmaus with the stranger who is Jesus. Have you ever had an encounter with a stranger that had a powerful effect on your life?

What is the importance of the “service of the Word” in the Eucharist?

What does Nouwen mean when he says: “The Word of God is sacramental”?

Discuss the statement: “The word of the Eucharist makes us part of the great story of our salvation.”

What is the relationship between God’s word and the Eucharistic life?

Notes

Meeting #3 (pp. 51-61/64-77)

III. Inviting the Stranger – “I Believe”

How do the stranger’s words change the meaning of going home for the two travelers returning to Emmaus?

In what ways does seeing “the Eucharist as an invitation to Jesus to stay with us” change our perspective on the sacrament?

“Only with an invitation to ‘come and stay with me’ can an interesting encounter develop into a transforming relationship.” Discuss this statement. Do you think that it is meant to be taken literally?

Why do we find it so difficult to invite Jesus into our lives?

Nouwen describes the Creed as “a profession of faith.” What does he mean? What does saying the Creed mean to you?

“The table is the place of intimacy.” What are the positive and negative aspects of this intimacy?

In our busy modern lives we often do not share meals with the members of our family. What do you believe we are losing by this lack of table fellowship?

Notes

Meeting #4 (pp. 63-76/80-97)

IV. Entering into Communion – “Take and Eat”

How do you celebrate the Eucharist in your church? Is it the “simple human gesture” that Nouwen refers to or is it an elaborate ceremony?

“The Eucharist is the most ordinary and the most divine gesture imaginable.”
Discuss this paradox.

“Incarnation and Eucharist are the two expressions of the immense, self-giving love of God.” What does this statement mean to you?

Discuss the concept of communion that Nouwen develops.

Nouwen states that “Eucharist is recognition.” What are we invited to recognize?

“[T]he deepest communion with Jesus is a communion that happens in his absence.” How does Nouwen explain this mystery?

How does communion create community?

Notes

Meeting #5 (pp. 77-95/100-126)

V. Going on a Mission – “Go and Tell”

How are Cleopas and his friend who return to Jerusalem different from the two travelers on their way to Emmaus? Have you ever experienced a similar transformation?

Why is it so important to “go and tell”?

What are the difficulties of carrying the Eucharistic mission to our family and friends first?

Why is it essential that we share our different stories?

“The movement flowing from the Eucharist is the movement from communion to community to ministry.” In what ways do you see this movement in your own life and your own church?

Nouwen says that “mission is possible only when it is as much receiving as giving, as much being cared for as caring.” Why is this so?

Why is statistical success not the true measure of the Eucharistic life? How do you understand its true measure?

Conclusion

How is it possible to lead a life of gratitude? How difficult do you find it to live that way?

Notes



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.

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" DVD Discussion based on reflection guide
 Other: _____

Additional comments welcome: _____

Please return completed forms to Maureen Wright at the Henri Nouwen Society:
In Canada — 113 St. Joseph St. 3rd Floor, Toronto, ON M5S 1J4
In the USA — P.O. Box 220522, St. Louis, MO 63122-0522