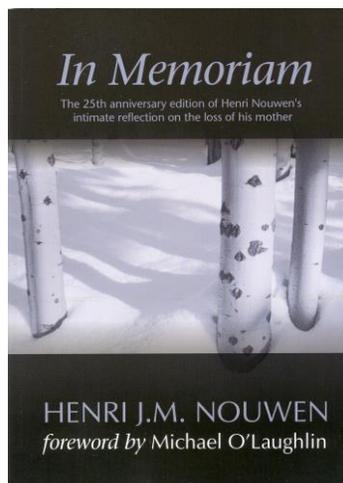


# *In Memoriam*

By Henri J.M. Nouwen

## Reflection Questions for Reading Groups



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***IN MEMORIAM***

By Henri J.M. Nouwen

**Reflection Questions**

Prepared by Albert Lewis

**Why did Henri Nouwen decide to write In Memoriam, and why was it so difficult to do so? Answer in Nouwen's words.**

**What does Nouwen mean when he writes:**

**“It is indeed in the usual, normal and ordinary events that we touch the mystery of human life. When a child is born, a man and woman embrace, or a mother or father dies, the mystery of life reveals itself to us. It is precisely in the moments when we are most human, most in touch with what binds us together, that we discover the hidden depths of life.”**

**How do you interpret or understand the comment:**

**“I realized that sorrow is an unwelcome companion and that anyone who willingly enters into the pain of a stranger is truly a remarkable person.”**

**What does Nouwen want us to understand when he writes:**

**“Peaceful people should die a peaceful death; faithful people should die a quiet death; loving people should die a gentle death. But is this true? Who am I to formulate simplistic equations and logical sequences? Since I do not even know why we live, why should I expect to know how we die? If life is a mystery, why should death be viewed as a reality within our grasp and understanding?”**

**Explain the following paragraph:**

**“I still wonder what I was feeling during those hours. I felt powerless, small and helpless, but also peaceful, strong and quiet. I was seeing and feeling something I had never seen or felt before, an experience that to be described would require words that have not yet been found: powerless yet strong, sad yet peaceful, broken yet whole. I still do not fully understand this new emotion. One thing, however, I can articulate because I felt it so clearly: I was blessed to be part of a moment of truth.”**

**How would Harold Kushner respond to Nouwen's following statement?**

**“Why? Why were we witnessing such pain and agony in a woman whose life had been one of goodness, gentleness, tenderness and love? Why did she who had been so generous and self-giving have to enter into this torturous hour? Why all the pain, this suffering, this struggle?”**

**Nouwen says:**

**“When I thought to myself, “It is better to live than not to live, it is better to struggle and fail than not to struggle at all,” I knew that she had something to do with it. Maybe I can say that she gave me that basic sense of the goodness of life that allowed me to move freely and fearlessly to many places, to live with many different people and in many different circumstances, and to feel free far from home.”**

**Is there a person in your life who has given you this ultimate sense of goodness?**

**How do you understand paragraph 2 on page 37? (This new closeness that we began to feel...)**

**On page 48, Nouwen writes: “My mind returned to one of the most difficult and saddest moments of the week...” Later, in the same paragraph, he writes: “She would not invite us to the table...” What does he want us to understand in this paragraph?**

**Writing about the walk to the cemetery Nouwen says:**

**“I had the feeling that this procession to the cemetery might be the shortest walk longest remembered.” What does he want us to understand?**

**Nouwen writes: “Mother has died and it was for my own good that she left.” What does he mean?**