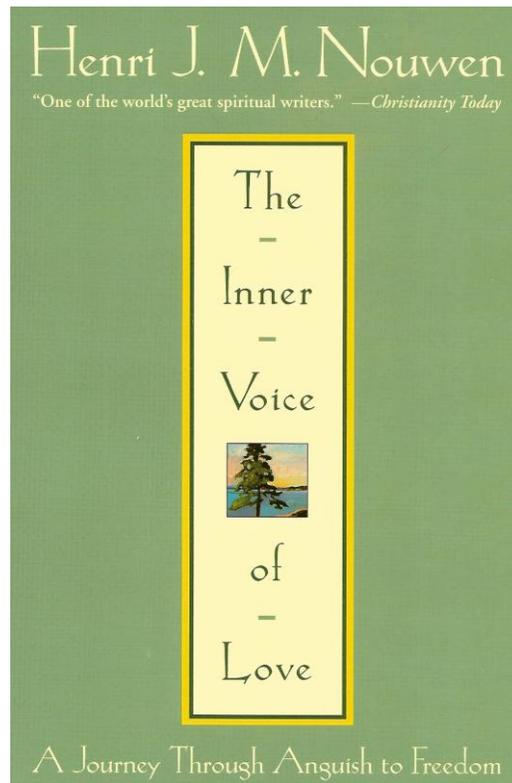


# *The Inner Voice of Love*

By Henri J.M. Nouwen

## Reflection Questions for Nouwen Reading Groups



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***The Inner Voice of Love***  
*A Journey Through Anguish to Freedom*  
**By Henri J.M. Nouwen**  
Doubleday, 1996, 118 pages

**Reflection Questions for Nouwen Reading Groups**

Prepared by Steve Berry

Contained within this book is an introduction on page xiii and a suggestion to the reader. Please read the suggestion to the reader and return to the introduction. Note that the introduction is an important starting point for reflection. Contained within it are numerous points that can be pondered. Upon reading the introduction you may wish to ask: What happened to Henri? Use some of Henri's words to describe his feelings (xv). Henri writes that it would be impossible to survive mentally and spiritually without support and guidance. How did he do it? (xvi) What value did writing have for Henri? (xvi)

He speaks about entering the "basement of my soul" and indicates that he could have become bitter, resentful, depressed and suicidal. Instead something positive happened. What happened? How did he feel?

What thoughts about new inner freedom and new hope and creativity from page xvii might be helpful as you read through the following pages?

Now go through the suggested readings. Find the title that seems to resonate with where you are in this moment. Go to the page. Read it. Stop. Reflect. Then follow the simple guide for further exploration. Ask, what do the words say to me? Do they apply to my life? Are they true? What parts of Henri's reflections speak to me? Does his insights touch some place in my heart and mind?

**Contents by Headings**

**Work Around Your Abyss**

What does Henri mean?

**Cling to the Promise**

How do you close yourself to the outside world so you can enter your own heart and the heart of God through your pain? God will send to you the people with whom you can share your anguish, who can lead you closer to the true source of love.

**Stop Being a Pleaser**

How can you reclaim your identity as a free self?

### **Trust the Inner Voice**

The word conversion meant to turn toward something. Henri Nouwen says you “know” the inner voice. Is he asking you to “turn” toward this voice in a new way? What does he say the promise will be?

### **Cry Inward**

Henri says there’s a “split” in us between divinity and humanity? Do you find this true? What are his suggestions to integrate the self? What’s the difference between crying outward and crying inward? When can you move beyond anguish?

### **Always Come Back to the Solid Place**

Where is the one place we can return to and what does Henri suggest we keep on saying? (Suggestion: post this phrase where you can see it frequently, or place it in your wallet or pocketbook. Refer to it in times of concern and challenge.)

### **Set Boundaries to Your Love**

What is so important about setting boundaries? How can not establishing boundaries be destructive? What good can come out of setting boundaries? What does Henri say the great task is as it refers to love?

### **Give Gratuitously**

Henri speaks about gratuitous love. What does he mean? What does he say is the great paradox of love?

### **Come Home**

One of the loveliest and most profound statements by Henri is contained within his two realities. What are they? What do they have to do with homecoming?

### **Understand the Limitations of Others**

What does Henri say about our feelings of rejection? What might they really be? What’s his suggestion?

### **Trust in the Place of Unity**

What is the experience of inner duality? How and through what are we called to unity?

### **Remain Attentive to Your Best Intuitions**

How can you remain attentive to your best intuitions? What does that mean in view of the past and living in the present?

### **Bring Your Body Home**

Henri writes about “bringing your body home.” What does he mean? What is new hope?

### **Enter the New Country**

In order to enter the new country what must you do? What is the only way to go there? What do you discover once arriving?

### **Keep Living Where God Is**

What happens when you live more deeply the spiritual life? What does Henri say your main question should always be? What does doing something for God's glory produce?

### **Rely on Your Spiritual Guides**

What are spiritual guides? What do they do? How can they help?

### **Go into the Place of Your Pain**

What is your pain, Henri asks? What does he say about dealing with pain?

### **Open Yourself to the First Love**

Henri says, "A love that comes to you through human beings is true, God-given love and needs to be celebrated as such." What did Henri discover in this personal revelation?

### **Acknowledge Your Powerlessness**

Henri states, "You have to say yes fully to your powerlessness in order to let God heal you." What does he suggest about power and powerlessness?

### **Seek a New Spirituality**

What is a new spirituality Henri speaks about that is being born? How can one claim their unique place in life as God's gift?

### **Tell Your Story in Freedom**

Henri writes, "When you keep reliving painful events of the past, you can feel victimized by them. But there is a way of telling your story that does not create pain." What is it he says? How does this relate to your story?

### **Find the Source of Your Loneliness**

If the spiritual task is not to escape your loneliness what is it? How do you find its source?

### **Keep Returning to the Road to Freedom**

Henri writes, "your healing is not a straight line." What are some personal setbacks? What does Henri recommend you do in spite of them?

### **Let Jesus Transform You**

"Jesus became flesh so that you could encounter him in the flesh and receive his love in the flesh." What does Henri mean by this statement? Why is it important?

### **Befriend Your Emotions**

Restlessness. Anxiety. How does Henri suggest we befriend our emotions?

### **Follow Your Deepest Calling**

When does Henri advise that we follow our deepest calling? How do we do it?

### **Remain Anchored in Your Community**

How can you be close to people in need without losing touch with those who protect your calling? What keeps fear away?

### **Stay with Your Pain**

Henri writes, “The pain you suffer now is meant to put you in touch with the place where you most need healing, your very heart.” What does he suggest we do?

### **Live Patiently with the “Not Yet”**

What does Henri mean by living patiently with the “not yet”? What will gradually happen if you do?

### **Keep Moving Toward Full Incarnation**

What does it mean to keep moving toward full incarnation?

### **See Yourself Truthfully**

Do you believe Henri’s assertion is true that “you cannot fully claim yourself when parts of you are still wayward”? Why? Why not? What can you do?

### **Receive All the Love That Comes to You**

What does the weakest part of our self want and when will that part no longer feel anguished?

### **Stay United with the Larger Body**

How is it that our own growth cannot take place without the growth of others? What does Jesus’ journey teach us about this?

### **Love Deeply**

How does Henri recommend that you deal with lost love? What does Henri say will happen the longer you live?

### **Stand Erect in Your Sorrow**

What is a temptation during times of struggle? What is Henri’s insight/suggestion?

### **Let Deep Speak to Deep**

Henri speaks of the pain of absence. What can overcome this pain? How can it be done?

### **Allow Yourself to Be Fully Received**

What does it mean to be “fully received”? What can be sure problems of giving and receiving?

### **Claim Your Unique Presence in Your Community**

How does God want you to be present to others? Explain. What does God not require of you? What might “creative presence” and “creative absence” mean in the context of community life? Explain.

### **Accept Your Identity as a Child of God**

What is the identity you are called to claim? What does Henri say this identity offers?

### **Own Your Pain**

You can share your struggle as a service only after what? How do you respond to Henri's statement: "Thus the core question in your ministry is 'Is my sharing of my struggle in the service of the one who seeks my help?'"

### **Know Yourself as Truly Loved**

Explain Henri's words: "You will discover that the more you love you can take in and hold on to, the less fearful you will become."

### **Protect Your Innocence**

You can only protect your innocence when you do what?

### **Let Your Lion Lie Down with Your Lamb**

What is spiritual maturity? How does it work? What is your lion and your lamb? What is Henri saying?

### **Be a Real Friend**

At what point does friendship become more and more possible? What does Henri dare us to do? What will happen?

### **Trust Your Friends**

What is Henri's advice in friendship concerning your own belief? What allowance are you to make?

### **Control Your Own Drawbridge**

How does Henri's metaphor of the castle and moat apply to your life? How and when do you use the drawbridge?

### **Avoid All Forms of Self-Rejection**

What are Henri's thoughts on self-rejection?

### **Take Up Your Cross**

What does it mean to "take up your cross"? What will doing this reveal?

### **Keep Trusting God's Call**

How can you, "Stay home, and trust that your life will be fruitful even when hidden"? Are you able to trust the few who know your inner journey? What does Henri say they will do?

### **Claim the Victory**

What does Henri say is your vocation? What is the victory you are to claim?

### **Face the Enemy**

What happens the more you sense God's call? What do you do when in doubt? What does the love of Jesus provide?

### **Continue Seeking Communion**

Henri says to trust in some special words of Jesus. What are they? What do they mean for your life?

### **Separate the False Pains from the Real Pain**

When you feel rejected what can you do?

### **Say Often, "Lord, Have Mercy"**

In the presence of attack what does Henri suggest you do?

### **Let God Speak Through You**

What does Henri invite you to do?

### **Know That You Are Welcome**

How do you know that you are welcome?

### **Permit Your Pain to Become the Pain**

Henri writes, "Healing means moving from *your* pain to *the* pain. What do you think this means? What is the "tie in" with Jesus?"

### **Give Your Agenda to God**

It is not easy to give your agenda to God. What happens if you do so?

### **Let Others Help You Die**

What does Henri write about trust?

### **Live Your Wounds Through**

Henri states that, "You need to let your words go down into your heart." What does he mean?

### **For Now, Hide Your Treasure**

What does this mean: "Finding the treasure without being ready yet to fully own it will make you restless"?

### **Keep Choosing God**

What is God saying to you?

### **Conclusion**

Henri in the end says that he has heard the inner voice of love. Explain.



## 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 21<sup>st</sup>, 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](http://www.HenriNouwen.org).

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<sup>1</sup> Photo of children with Henri in Guatemala by Peter Weiskel. Used with permission.

<sup>2</sup> Henri Nouwen in Ukraine.

*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



What would be one step we could take to make our reading group resources more helpful? \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

Additional comments welcome: \_\_\_\_\_

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*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: \_\_\_\_\_

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