

## A Beautiful Adventure: the Gift of the Arts in Spiritual Formation

with Carolyn Arends

### Reflection Guide: Session 2

1. Carolyn reminds us that art and beauty do not have to be “useful” to be worthy of our attention. Henri Nouwen said, “In many ways we are like the busy executive who walks up to a precious flower and says: “What for God’s sake are you doing here? Can’t you get busy somehow?” and then finds the flower’s response incomprehensible: “I am sorry, but I am just here to be beautiful.” How can we also come to this wisdom of the flower that being is more important than doing? How can we come to a creative contact with the grounding of our own life?”

Reflect on Henri’s words and questions. In what ways might you need to address your own inner drive to be “useful” or, to put it another way, the discouragement you may feel when you are not “useful”?

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2. It has been suggested that we are living in the most distracted time in all of human history. Reflect on this genuine crisis. Why is it so important to (re)learn how to be deeply attentive? How is the capacity to pay attention connected to our capacity for true devotion?

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3. One of the ingrained habits we need to contend with is the tendency to give “selective attention” to the things we choose and prioritize. Art and beauty help train us to open our attention and to be surprised by the unexpected. Why might this be helpful in our spiritual journeys? In what ways might you be blessed by ‘opening’ your attention to new aspects of the arts?

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4. What did you notice about the painting, “The Supper at Emmaus”? Was it challenging to pay attention for two minutes – or did it feel like it wasn’t long enough? Do you think you might see and reflect even more deeply if you returned to the painting?

You can find it here: <https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/michelangelo-merisi-da-caravaggio-the-supper-at-emmaus>

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5. How was your experience with the abstract painting “Resurrection” different then the first, more realistic painting? What did you notice in yourself during the two minutes reflecting on the abstract painting?

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6. In what ways have you experienced times of spiritual deafness and blindness? Which of your senses, if trained to be attentive, might most awaken you to God's presence? Why do you think they might be helpful to you spiritually?

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7. We tend to avoid discomfort and can easily slip into a sense of complacency. How might the arts help you to connect with God's vision for the world? In what ways have the arts helped you to long for justice and for God to finish the work of "making all things new"?

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