

HENRI J.M. NOUWEN

GOD'S
ABIDING
LOVE

*Daily Lenten
Meditations
and Prayers*



INTRODUCTION

Since his death in 1996, Henri Nouwen was then, and still remains, one of the most widely read spirituality authors of all time. What makes this so is his almost uncanny ability to probe the depths of his own heartfelt desires, doubts and weaknesses. Nouwen has a way of explaining God's abiding love for us that comes alive in every word, every sentence, every reflection. His search for truth becomes our search for truth. His search for God becomes our search for God. Once captivated by Nouwen's simple, clear, accessible language, we become passengers on our own spiritual journey, uncovering spiritual longings in ourselves. Take the time to enjoy these excerpts from many of Nouwen's classic books. It is a journey that holds out the promise of a compelling encounter with yourself—and God.

As always, our Lenten devotional booklets begin with a line of Scripture, followed by a reflection and end with a brief prayer. Find a quiet place to spend a few moments reading and thinking about the reflection. Let Nouwen's words move you in a spiritual direction toward a deeper understanding of your own relationship with God and his abiding love for you.

—Paul Pennick, editor

'YOU ARE MY BELOVED'

Whenever you pray, go in to your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

MATTHEW 6:6

In prayer we seek God's voice and allow God's word to penetrate our fear and resistance so that we can begin to hear what God wants us to know. And what God wants us to know is that before we think or do or accomplish anything, before we have much money or little money, the deepest truth of our human identity is this: "You are my beloved son. You are my beloved daughter. With you I am well pleased." When we can claim this truth as true for us, then we also see that it is true for all other people. God is well pleased with us, and so we are free to approach all people, the rich or the poor, in the freedom of God's love... As our prayer deepens into a constant awareness of God's goodness, the spirit of gratitude grows within us. Gratitude flows from the recognition that who we are and what we have are gifts to be received and shared.

Dearest Lord, help me grow in prayer and gratitude this Lenten season.

TRUST IN GOD

What does it profit them if they gain the whole world, but lose or forfeit themselves?

LUKE 9:25

What is our security base? God or Mammon? That is what Jesus would ask. He says that we cannot put our security in God and also in money. We have to make a choice. Jesus counsels: "Put your security in God." We have to make a choice where we want to belong, to the world or to God. Our trust, our basic trust,

Jesus teaches, has to be in God. As long as our real trust is in money, we cannot be true members of the Kingdom... What is the true base of our security?

Loving God, I put my trust in you.

■ FRIDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY

A MERCY GREATER THAN OUR SINS

Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love...
I know my transgressions...

PSALM 51:1, 3

God's mercy is greater than our sins. There is an awareness of sin that does not lead to God but to self-preoccupation. Our temptation is to be so impressed by our sins and failings and so overwhelmed by our lack of generosity that we get stuck in a paralyzing guilt. It is the guilt that says: "I am too sinful to deserve God's mercy." It is the guilt that leads to introspection instead of directing our eyes to God. It is the guilt that has become an idol and therefore a form of pride. Lent is the time to break down this idol and to direct our attention to our loving Lord. The question is: Are we like Judas, who was so overcome by his sin that he could not believe in God's mercy any longer and hanged himself. Or are we like Peter who returned to his Lord with repentance and cried bitterly for his sins? The season of Lent, during which winter and spring struggle with each other for dominance, helps us in a special way to cry out for God's mercy.

Lord, have mercy on me a sinner.

■ SATURDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY

THE DANGERS OF DEPENDENCY

The LORD will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong.

ISAIAH 58:11

Many voices around and within us warn us of the dangers of dependence. We fear being dependent on others because of the idea that dependence is a threat to our security. A friend once told me how often his father would say, “Son, be sure you don’t become dependent on anybody. Be sure you do not have to beg for what you need. Be sure that you always have enough money so you can have your own house, your own things, and your own people to help you. As long as you have some money in the bank, nothing bad can really happen to you.” The pressure in our culture to secure our own future and to control our lives as much as possible does not find support in the Bible.

Dear God, help me find my security in you.

■ FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

YOU ARE A CHILD OF GOD

The LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.

GENESIS 2:7

You are a child of God. I want you for a moment, for a few minutes, to think about it not intellectually but go with me and listen to me simply saying the same thing in different ways. See if you can make connections here. Because God is saying to us you are my child. You are written in the palms of my hands. You are hidden in the shadow of my hands. I have molded you out of the secret of the earth. I have knitted you together in your mother’s womb. You belong to me. I am yours, you are mine. I have called

you from eternity. You are the one who is held safe and embraced in love from eternity to eternity. You belong to me. I am holding you safe, and I want you to know that whatever happens to you I am always there. I was always there. I am always there. I always will be there and hold you in my embrace. You are mine. You are my child.

I am yours, dear Lord, heal my brokenness.

■ MONDAY FIRST WEEK OF LENT

A GIFT TO THE WORLD

You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself.

LEVITICUS 19:18

Your life is not for yourself. My life is not for myself. The deepest desires of you and me is to give myself to others. That's part of me. Not just a part of my life, all of me. I am created to give myself away. In my giving myself away I want to be a fruitful person, not a successful person, not a rich person, not a person with many results—to have a fruitful life. Our lives bear fruit in the giving. I am more and more aware that the deepest joy of the spiritual life is precisely in giving myself, giving ourselves, in giving ourselves away. We can do it because we know that we are the beloved who are blessed and broken, but that we were broken in order that we could become a gift for the world.

Heavenly Father, help me love my neighbor as you love me.

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- Henri J.M. Nouwen

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