HENRI J.M. NOUWEN

Wait for the Lord

DAILY ADVENT MEDITATIONS & PRAYERS
It is doubtful that there is a more appropriate author than Henri Nouwen to accompany us during Advent. Nouwen’s words, taken from several of his timeless books, are certain to enrich your spiritual journey as we await the birth of the Christ Child. Few people can reach down and touch our deepest doubts, anxieties and joys as Henri Nouwen seems to do so effortlessly. It is because he shares these same emotional highs and lows that he is able to uncover the intimate, spiritual dimension within them that can help enliven our faith life.

Take the time this holy season to spend a few minutes with these reflections by one of the world's truly gifted spiritual writers. Let Nouwen's words seep into your heart and make your Advent a rich and rewarding experience, bringing you closer to God and to his people. As always our seasonal booklets begin with a line or two from Scripture, followed by a reflection and ending with a prayer. Have a blessed Advent and merry Christmas!

Paul Pennick, editor
In our personal lives, waiting is not a very popular pastime. Waiting is not something we anticipate or experience with great joy and gladness! In fact, most of us consider waiting a waste of time. Perhaps this is because the culture in which we live is basically saying, “Get going! Do something! Show you are able to make a difference! Don't just sit there and wait!” So, for us and for many people, waiting is a dry desert between where we are and where we want to be. We do not enjoy such a place. We want to move out of it and do something worthwhile.

**DEAR LORD, help me be patient as I await your arrival.**
Living as God’s Child

Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, but only speak the word, and my servant will be healed.  
MATTHEW 8:8

I know that I am called to live at the place of innocence—the place where Jesus chose to live. There he made his home and asks me to make mine. In that place I am loved and well held. There I do not have to be afraid. And from there I can forgive and heal and make things new...

Can I live innocently on this planet in the years ahead? Can I choose to make my innocence my home, think from there, speak from there, act from there? It is a hard choice because my insecure self wants so much to be part of a world that controls, rewards and tells me whether I am good or bad. But I can go beyond that insecurity and discover my sacred center, fashioned in secret and molded in the depths of the earth...

I know that every time I choose for my innocence, I don’t have to worry about the next ten years. I can simply be where I am, listening, seeing, touching in the very moment, always sure that I am not alone but with him who called me to live as God’s child.

DEAR JESUS, heal my wounds and open my heart to your love.
‘Rejoice and Be Glad’

This is the day that the LORD has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it. Psalm 118:24

I experienced it in my own seminary years and... many other places. Everywhere there was a tendency to live, act and think as if the real life is not here but there, not now but later. Community develops where we experience that something significant is taking place where we are. It is the fruit of the intimate knowledge that we are together, not because of a common need—such as to learn a language—but because we are called together to him who is greater than these needs.

I do not know if I will be alive tomorrow, next week or next year. Therefore today is always more important than tomorrow. We have to be able to say each day, “This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad.”

Bring us together, loving Lord, so that we may do your will.
And he will destroy on this mountain  
the shroud that is cast over all peoples,  
the sheet that is spread over all nations;  
he will swallow up death forever.  
Then the Lord GOD will wipe away the tears from all faces...  
ISAIAH 25:7-8

The expectation of Advent is anchored in the event of God’s incarnation. The more I come in touch with what happened in the past, the more I come in touch with what is to come. The gospel not only reminds me of what took place but also of what will take place. In the contemplation of Christ’s first coming, I can discover the signs of his second coming. By looking back in meditation, I can look forward in expectation. By reflection, I can project; by conserving the memory of Christ’s birth, I can progress to the fulfillment of his kingdom. I am struck by the fact that the prophets speaking about the future of Israel always kept reminding their people of God’s great works in the past. They could look forward with confidence because they could look backward with awe to Yahweh’s great deeds...

I pray that Advent will offer me the opportunity to deepen my memory of God’s great deeds in time and will set me free to look forward with courage to the fulfillment of time by him who came and is still to come.

HEAVENLY FATHER, set us free!
A Living Force

I have loved you with an everlasting love. JEREMIAH 31:3

It is central to the biblical tradition that God's love for his people should not be forgotten. It should remain with us in the present. When everything is dark, when we are surrounded by despairing voices, when we do not see any exits, then we can find salvation in a remembered love, a love which is not simply a wistful recollection of a bygone past but a living force which sustains us in the present. Through memory, love transcends the limits of time and offers hope at any moment of our lives.

This is the message of the Bible... This also is the message which forms the core of our lives... the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

DEAR GOD, thank you for your everlasting love.
Henri Nouwen, one of the most popular spiritual writers of the last century, makes a wonderful Advent companion. He understood our sense of incompleteness and yearning so well, and he gave it an articulate voice. As one who struggled with waiting yet sought his Savior over a lifetime, Henri Nouwen offers insights that add depth and self-discovery to our spiritual journey as we await the birth of the Christ Child. This booklet is a must for all those longing for a closer relationship with Jesus, the One who is to come.