

## The Enduring influence of Henri Nouwen

Steven Stanley and Larry Braskamp

Luke 15:11-32 *“The Parable of the Lost Son”*

*Jesus continued: “There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So he divided his property between them.*

*“Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.*

*“When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.’ So he got up and went to his father.*

*“But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.*

*“The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’*

*“But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.*

*“Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. ‘Your brother has come,’ he replied, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’*

*“The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, ‘Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!’*

*“ ‘My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ ”*

Dear God,

I so much want to be in control.

I want to be the master of my own destiny.

Still I know what you are saying:

“Let me take you by the hand and lead you.

Accept my love

And trust that where I will bring you,

The deepest desires of your heart will be fulfilled.”

Lord, open my hands to receive your gift of love.

Amen (January 31)

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**Closing Prayer** – What would it mean for me to live this week as God’s beloved?

Dear God,

As you draw me ever deeper into your heart,

I discover that my companions on the

journey are women and men

loved by you as fully and as intimately as I am.

In your compassionate heart,

There is a place for all of them.

No one is excluded.

Give me a share in your compassion, dear God,

So that your unlimited love may become visible

in the way I love my brothers and sisters.

Amen

(July 31)

## **Life of Henri Nouwen**

Henri Jozef Machiel Nouwen (1932-1996) was a Dutch Catholic priest, theologian, professor, and spiritual writer. He is best known for making profound Christian spirituality accessible to ordinary people through deeply personal, honest writing. He taught at Yale, Harvard, and Notre Dame, yet he struggled internally with loneliness, insecurity, and the tension between public success and inner spiritual longing. (AI ChatGPT)

Ultimately it was at the L'Arche Daybreak Community that he found the home he was seeking. There, where he was accepted and loved for being Henri—quite apart from his achievements and his books—he found the pathway to his own healing. This was not because his own brokenness was somehow mended, but because there he finally found a place where his own brokenness could be the doorway to resurrection. From Henri Nouwen, Edited by Stephen Lazarus, *Community*, Orbis Books, 2021, Page x

“I am still the restless, nervous, intense, distracted, and impulse-driven person I was when I set out on this spiritual journey.” But that was only one side of Henri—the desire to outrun and escape the claims of his wounded and conflictive nature. The other side, beneath all the restless searching was his unending effort to run toward Jesus and the insight that where Jesus was to be found was not in success, glory, or the applause of the crowd; it was a path of downward mobility, toward the poor, the marginalized, and the ordinary.

## **Spiritual life and community**

Our spiritual life is the slow journey of allowing God’s love to move from our heads to our hearts. We are not talking here about moral obligations or ethical imperatives. We are talking about the mystical life. It is intimate communication with God that reveals to us how to live in the world and act in God’s Name. (Gabrielle Earnshaw Ed., *Henri J. M. Nouwen. You are the Beloved*, 2017, New York, Image. Page November 17)

To know ourselves truly and acknowledge fully our own unique journey, we need to be known and acknowledged by others for who we are. We cannot live a spiritual life in secrecy. We cannot find our way to true freedom in isolation. Silence without speaking is as dangerous as solitude without community. They belong together. (November 25)

When we love God with all our heart, mind, strength, and soul, we cannot do other than love our neighbor, and our very selves. It is in being fully rooted in the heart of God that we are creatively connected with our neighbor as well as with our deepest self. In the heart of God we can see that the other human beings who live on this earth with us are also God’s sons and daughters, and belong to the same family we do. There, too, I can recognize and claim my own belovedness, and celebrate with my neighbors.