

A Spirituality of Caregiving – Henri Nouwen

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When our wounds cease to be a source of shame, and become a source of healing, we have become wounded healers. *Henri Nouwen*

Biographical info:

- Henri J.M. Nouwen - 1932 to 1996 – one of most read spiritual writers of our time
- Author of 40 books; hundreds of others written about him and with his materials since his death
- Studied at Menninger Institute - birthplace of CPE
- Taught at Notre Dame, Yale, Harvard; spent time in a monastery and in missions in South America
- Lived at L'Arche Daybreak, Richmond Hill ON, 1986 to 1996

Major themes in his writings:

- Care, Compassion
- Vulnerability; Fruitfulness vs Success
- Sorrow/Joy; Moving from fear to love
- Grief; Loss; Dying
- Peace; Loneliness; Solitude; Ministry; Solidarity
- Being a Wounded Healer; 'The Wounded Healer'
- Recognizing we are unconditionally loved - God's Beloved; 'Return of the Prodigal Son'
- Struggle through Depression 'The Inner Voice of Love'

Nouwen's Insights on Caring:

Care: *is an invitation to enter into someone else's pain before doing something about it*

- Community is important
- There is mutuality in the care relationship
- There are challenges in caring for both the carer and the person receiving care
- There are gifts to be received in the care relationship, which can nourish the caregiver
- There are many ways to be healthy as you care for others – important to learn to give and receive and to care for yourself when you care for others

"No, we shouldn't try to care by ourselves. Care is not an endurance test. We should, whenever possible, care together with others."

Caregiver vs. Care Partner

“Caring is a partnership where one person reveals their pain, brokenness and vulnerability to another. Through a relationship of trust, they work together towards healing and wholeness.”

O’Rourke and Dufour : ‘Embracing the End of Life’

“The friend who can be silent with us in a moment of despair or confusion, who can stay with us in an hour of grief and bereavement, who can tolerate not-knowing, not-curing, not-healing and face with us the reality of our powerlessness, that is the friend who cares.” *From ‘Out of Solitude’*

“We are often tempted to “explain” suffering in terms of “the will of God”. Not only can this evoke anger and frustration, but also it is false. “God’s will” is not a label that we can put on unhappy situations. God wants to bring us joy not pain, peace not war, healing not suffering. Therefore, instead of declaring anything and everything to be the will of God, we must be willing to ask ourselves where in the midst of our pains and sufferings we can discern the loving presence of God”.

From ‘Compassion: A Reflection on the Christian Life’

Avoiding Burnout – Henri Nouwen

- Burnout is giving without receiving
- Important not to be alone in caring, and to be aware of limits
- Realize when it’s time for a time out or a change and not feel guilty about it
- Important to be cared for yourself – Where do you find support?
- Trust that when you leave your presence will continue
- To be a good care partner is to be really present
- Most difficult thing is to be ‘present’ but only half there – be present but not want to be. This leads to resentment

Helpful Resources

- The Henri Nouwen Society – daily meditations – books highlighted - www.henrinouwen.org
- **Books by Michelle O’Rourke:** *Healthy Caregiving: Perspectives for Caring Professionals, in company with Henri JM Nouwen* (Novalis, 2020) *Embracing the End of Life: Help for Those Who Accompany the Dying* (Novalis, 2012) co-authored with Eugene Dufour; *Befriending Death: Henri Nouwen and a Spirituality of Dying* (Orbis, 2009) – all available through Amazon or on www.selahresources.ca
- Books on Caregiving include: *A Spirituality of Caregiving* (John Mogabgab editor); *Hope for Caregivers and Courage for Caregivers* – Intervarsity Press
- Other books - *Compassion; Aging; Wounded Healer; Our Greatest Gift; Inner Voice of Love*
- *Bread for the Journey and You Are the Beloved* – books of daily readings