



“Henri Nouwen and Spiritual Direction: Companions for the Long Journey” Rev. Bill Haley

(all quotations from Henri Nouwen unless otherwise noted)

An Introduction to Nouwen, and Spiritual Direction

“The most personal is the most universal...What we live in the most intimate places of our beings is not just for us but for all people. That is why our inner lives are lives for others. That is why our solitude is a gift to our community, and that is why our most secret thoughts affect our common life.” Bread for the Journey

Books that have particularly impacted me as a disciple first and also spiritual director: A Cry for Mercy, The Genesee Diary, The Inner Voice of Love, The Return of the Prodigal Son, In the Name of Jesus, With Burning Hearts, The Way of the Heart, The Wounded Healer, The Life of the Beloved, and more.

“We need a guide, a director...who helps us to distinguish between the voice of God and all other voices coming from our own confusion or from dark powers far beyond our control. We need someone who encourages us when we are tempted to give it all up, to forget it all, to just walk away in despair. We need someone who discourages us when we move too rashly in unclear directions or hurry proudly to a nebulous goal. We need someone who can suggest to us when to read and when to be silent, which words to reflect upon and what to do when silence creates much fear and little peace.” Reaching Out

On Spiritual Direction

What it is not...

What it is, and what a spiritual director does....

“A spiritual director is not a counselor, a therapist or an analyst, but a mature fellow Christian to whom we choose to be accountable for our spiritual life and from whom we can expect prayerful guidance in our constant struggle to discern God’s active presence in our lives.”

“Spiritual Direction”, *Reflections Journal* from Yale Divinity School, 1981

From the absurd to the obedient...

“The goal of spiritual direction is spiritual formation—the ever increasing capacity to live a spiritual life from the heart....The greatest call of a spiritual director is to open the door to the opportunity for spiritual growth and sometimes provide a glimpse of the great mysterious light behind the curtain of life and of the Lord who is the source of all knowing and the giver of life. To receive spiritual direction is to recognize that God does not solve our problems our answer all our questions, but leads us closer to the mystery of our existence where all questions cease.” Henri Nouwen, Spiritual Direction

“Spiritual direction is a continuous process of formation and guidance, in which a Christian is led and encouraged in his special vocation, so that by faithful correspondence to the graces of the Holy Spirit he may attain to the particular end of his vocation and to union with God.” Thomas Merton

“Spiritual direction is the process whereby one person offers a listening, prayerful presence to another while they journey together with God. The spiritual director is one who, most simply, walks alongside another person helping them listen to what God is saying in their lives and recognize God’s action.” Bill Haley

Two Images: A midwife and a hospice nurse

Jesus in Luke 24.13ff

Who is the spiritual director?

“The Holy Spirit is the True director in the fullest sense of the word”. Thomas Merton

“God’s Spirit is ultimately the sole source of spiritual guidance, comfort and knowing.” Nouwen

“I have asked many people for counsel in my own personal and professional life. The more I reflect on this, the more I realize that I experience guidance and hope, not because of any specific suggestion or advice but because of a strength far beyond their own awareness which radiated from my counselors....It seems that we often reveal and communicate to others the life-giving spirit without being aware of it.” The Living Reminder

The Prime Practice of the Spiritual Director:

Listening with both ears pointed in different directions

The Prime Disciplines for all of us, but particularly the spiritual director

Nouwen identifies three of them:

The Discipline of the Church (the life of Christ)

The Discipline of the Book (the Word of God)

The Discipline of the Heart (the inner life)

Four themes (among others) which will be important in the life of the spiritual director and come up often in spiritual direction from Nouwen's whole body of work

1. *Nothing matters more than deepening in our intimacy with God and nurturing our life with God*
“What needs to be guarded is the life of the Spirit within us. Especially we who want to witness to the presence of God's Spirit in the world need to tend the fire with the utmost care....Our first and foremost task is faithfully to care for the inward fire so that when it is really needed it can offer warmth and light to lost travelers.” The Way of the Heart
2. *This requires space for God through silence, solitude, and prayer*
“When we have been remodeled into living witnesses of Christ through solitude, silence, and prayer, we will no longer have to worry about whether we are saying the right thing or making the right gesture, because then Christ will make his presence known even when we are not aware of it.” The Way of the Heart
3. *We are the presence of Jesus in the world, living a Eucharistic life nourished and sustained with Jesus himself in the Eucharist, for the sake of others*
“When Jesus took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to his disciples, he summarized in these gestures his own life. Jesus is chosen from all eternity, blessed at his baptism in the Jordan River, broken on the cross, and given as bread to the world. Being chosen, blessed, broken, and given is the sacred journey of the Son of God, Jesus the Christ. When we take bread, bless it, break it, and give it with the words "This is the Body of Christ," we express our commitment to make our lives conform to the life of Christ. We too want to live as people chosen, blessed, and broken, and thus become food for the world.” Bread for the Journey
4. *We are the Beloved!*

It's been said that Nouwen wrote the same book over 30 times, and this is it...

“**You are the Beloved?**—My only desire to is to make these words reverberate in every corner of your Being.” The Life of the Beloved

DISCUSSION: What are your insights? Thoughts? Questions?

A Thanksgiving to Henri Nouwen, STILL our Spiritual Director.....

“As we grow older we have more and more people to remember, people who have died before us. It is very important to remember those who have loved us and those we have loved. Remembering them means letting their spirits inspire us in our daily lives. They can become part of our spiritual communities and gently help us as we make decisions on our journeys. Parents, spouses, children, and friends can become true spiritual companions after they have died. Sometimes they can become even more intimate to us after death than when they were with us in life. Remembering the dead is choosing their ongoing companionship.”

For further reading (**Required reading for the course Nouwen taught on Spiritual Direction)

**Kenneth Leech, [Soul Friend: An Invitation to Spiritual Direction](#)

**Thomas Merton, [Spiritual Direction and Meditation](#)

Henri Nouwen, “Spiritual Direction”, *Reflections Journal* from Yale Divinity School, 1981

Jeannette Bakke, [Holy Invitations: Exploring Spiritual Direction](#)

Thomas Hart, [The Art of Christian Listening](#)

David Benner, [Sacred Companions: The Gift of Spiritual Friendship and Spiritual Direction](#)

Margaret Guenther, [Holy Listening: The Art of Spiritual Direction](#)

Tilden Edwards, [Spiritual Director, Spiritual Companion: A Guide to Tending the Soul](#)

Wilfred Stinessen, [The Gift of Spiritual Direction: On Spiritual Guidance and Care for the Soul](#)

Henri Nouwen, [Spiritual Direction: Wisdom for the Long Walk of Faith](#)

(compiled by Michael Christensen and Rebecca Laird)