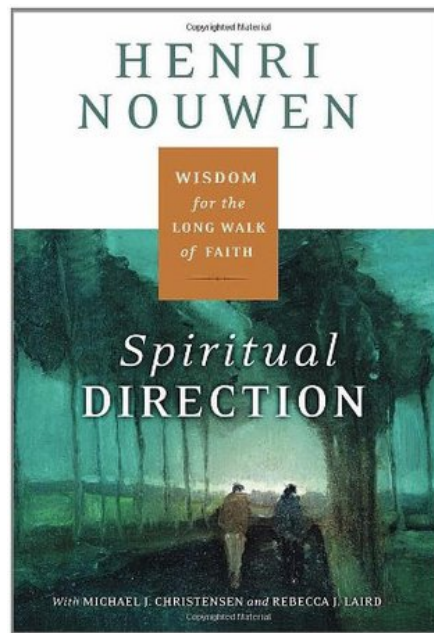




Spiritual Direction: Wisdom for the Long Walk of Faith

Henri J.M. Nouwen , Michael J. Christensen , Rebecca Laird

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Spiritual Direction gives us the unique and unrivaled experience of having Henri Nouwen as our personal spiritual director, answering our questions about the spiritual life in his wise, comfortable, and engaging style. With Nouwen's guidance, we can reorient our lives and open the door to true spiritual transformation.

Henri Nouwen, the world-renowned spiritual guide and counselor, understood the spiritual life as a journey of faith and transformation that is deepened by accountability, community, and relationships. Though he counseled many people during his lifetime, his principles of spiritual direction were never written down. Now two of his longtime students, Michael Christensen and Rebecca Laird, have taken his famous course in spiritual direction and supplemented it with his unpublished writings to create the definitive work on Nouwen's thoughts on the Christian life. Stories, readings, and thematically organized questions for reflection and guided journal writing provide an unparalleled resource for spiritual direction, both for individuals and for small groups.

Spiritual Direction: Wisdom for the Long Walk of Faith Details

Date : Published May 23rd 2006 by HarperOne (first published 2006)

ISBN : 9780060754730

Author : Henri J.M. Nouwen , Michael J. Christensen , Rebecca Laird

Format : Hardcover 192 pages

Genre : Spirituality, Religion, Christian, Nonfiction, Theology



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From Reader Review Spiritual Direction: Wisdom for the Long Walk of Faith for online ebook

Crystal Bedell says

I'm so excited for having discovered Fr. Nouwen. This book is beautifully written and truly offers "wisdom for the long walk of faith." Nouwen is transparent and vulnerable, a true human with insights that can only come from a spiritual leader. My only regret is that I must return my copy to the library. I'll be adding the hard cover to my Amazon wish list and making this a top shelf read.

J K Hoffman says

It was good, even though it was, at times, clearly pieced together from different writings. I liked that each chapter ended with an exercise based on the material in the chapter. Although I didn't do all the exercises, I do plan to go back to do more of them in the future. And, I'm looking forward to the other two books in this series.

Jen Heininger says

I have yet to read anything by Henri Nouwen that I didn't love. He is so transparent in his struggles and moved thru life very honestly examining his sin. Great book on everyday struggle as well as living in community ("The Road to Daybreak" is another favorite of his along these lines.)

Stacey Lozano says

I tried to read this semi-slow, but it didn't work out. The best way I suggest to read this as they do at the beginning of the book. Once straight through, and then once taking a chapter a week or month to work through the questions, topics, and ideas. There is a lot here which I can take away from the book, and I will probably go through it slower after I finish the trilogy.

Luke Hillier says

This is the first new Henri Nouwen book that I've read in a few years (after a deep dive into his work in college) and it was so much like returning to an old friend. I just find his words to be so comforting, gentle, and wise; it was exactly the book I needed for a more stressful and anticipatory stretch I was in. I particularly liked his thoughts around solidarity, downward mobility, and compassion here, but the book as a whole was great.

Kirsten says

provided much inspiration.

"it helps to realize that the Bible is not primarily a book of information about God but of formation of the heart. it is not merely a book to be analyzed, scrutinized, & discussed, but a book to nurture, unify, & serve as a constant source of contemplation. we must struggle constantly against the temptation to read the Bible instrumentally as a book full of good stories & illustrations that can help us make our point in sermons, lectures, papers, & articles. the Bible does not speak to us as long as we want to use it. as long as we deal with the word of God as an item with which we can do many useful things, we don't really read the Bible or let it read us. only when we are willing to hear the written word as a word for us can the Living Word disclose himself & penetrate into the center of our heart."

Buddy Draper says

This is a compilation of essays and lessons from Nouwen brought together on this subject. I truly love and enjoy everything by Nouwen and I found this encouraging and challenging.

Bob Price says

Spiritual Direction is a series of lectures based on Henri Nouwen's classes and articles he wrote about...so in that sense it is not necessarily a Henri Nouwen *book*.

But any chance to go through Nouwen's wisdom on spirituality is a good one. This book is divided into three sections: looking within, looking for God in the Word and looking for God in community. He explores each of these sections with biblical knowledge, personal stories, and a deep insight into the nature of people.

The book is designed for a quick read, but then provides an opportunity to go back and to re do the book with spiritual practices.

Nouwen's writing is very clear and very accessible. This is a good beginning to an understanding of Christian spirituality.

The title is misleading, because one might think the book is about the acutal art of spiritual direction...when it is not.

I highly recommend this book to anyone who is interested in Spirituality

Grade: B

Ryan says

I highly recommend this book! Nouwen's intuition, gentleness, and brilliance converge to encourage and

direct. So good!

Valerie Ohle says

God, if you're willing, please send me to a mountain top cabin alone with plenty of blank journals, pens, no distractions, and adequate sustenance for the next time I read this book.

I loved this. As I said in an earlier comment, I wish I'd read this before I attempted Foster's Celebration of Discipline. This was so clear, so practical. This is going on my must-read list.

Seth says

This book was fantastic to read.

A lot of questions I have about my own stage in life and what I'm becoming had light shed on them from this book. The book is divided into three parts: Looking within, Looking to God, and Looking to others.

Looking within asked questions such as, "where do I begin?" "Who am I?" "Where have I been and where am I going?" While the answers (and others I have personally) weren't *completely* answered, they did provide a roadmap for me to travel.

Each chapter ends with a spiritual practice of some sort. They are meant to be done in a group, alone, or with a spiritual director.

The book is meant to be read twice: once through quickly and the next time slowly and allowing the chapter to soak into you. I look forward to go back and let the chapters speak to me once again. Would recommend.

Walter says

This is the author's last book, published posthumously and representing an edited compilation of his work in this area. Therefore, one might expect it to differ in form and substance from his previous work; this would be a mistaken assumption. It is a very well-done piece of meaningful insight and practical application rolled into one.

As a discipline, spiritual direction is something that Henri Nouwen both practiced and preached, so to speak, serving in the role of spiritual director for many while he was also led by others himself. I believe that it's this experience of the process from both sides - that of being the leader in the relationship and that of being the follower - that informs this work. In this book, his colleagues set out to collect his work in this domain and to develop it into a coherent guide to the art and practice of spiritual direction. They do so ably.

The format of the book is to focus on an aspect of the discipline of spiritual direction and then to conclude each corresponding chapter with an exercise that is the practical application of what preceded it. In fact, the exercises are so reflective and comprehensive that they could form a separate piece of work. For the person with a serious interest in this process of spiritual self-discovery and -development, these practical applications are both meaningful exercises in themselves as well as helpful tools when working with others

(including one's own spiritual director and/or prayer group).

The theory and theology that are contained in the work are also outstanding. For example, Nouwen's treatment of relationships (or being in community as he calls it) and the expectations that we bring to them is particularly insightful. Distinguishing between what is possible for us as humans - our love is always somewhat conditional, he maintains - versus what emanates from the experience of the divine - which is truly unconditional - he then suggests a re-orientation: given that we cannot provide to ourselves or to others truly unconditional love (which is only God's provenance), we must be able to forgive and to celebrate. We must forgive each other for being unable to provide what everything that another wants and needs and yet celebrate what he/she/they can and do provide. In other words, we recognize each other's limits, respect them and work within these boundaries to achieve a synergistic, mutually beneficial relationship. As he puts it, "Community is solitude greeting solitude: 'I am the beloved; you are the beloved; together we can build a home or place of welcome together,'" a place he acknowledges will be happy at times and less so at others. That he acknowledges the reality of fluctuating human emotions makes his theology both more accessible and more practical for daily use.

Similarly, as he points out, the questions in our lives must be lived (though we tend only to want to find the answers and in so doing to conclude our unknowing as quickly as possible and then to move on). "The first task of seeking guidance is to touch your own struggles, doubts, and insecurities - in short, to affirm your life as a quest.... Our lives are not problems to be solved but journeys to be taken with Jesus as our friend and finest guide." This reminder that it's in the experience of divining answers that we live most fully - or, alternatively, that it's the focus on the journey that matters, not the destination per se - is especially prescient in today's performance- and goal-oriented, increasingly secularized culture.

There are some challenges with the book. For example, there are passages that are so "touchy-feely" that if one has even a touch of skeptic in him or her, there will be a tendency to want to discard the attendant insights. Don't; live through the squishiness and the author will guide you back to more (emotionally/spiritually) balanced ground soon enough. Also, some of the author's revelations about himself are a bit overwrought and can distract somewhat from the points that he's trying to make.

This being said, these are mere quibbles about an otherwise strong work. Those who are interested in this discipline and open to the wisdom contained in this book will be deeply moved and effectively developed by the experience. Therefore, this effort represents a fitting coda to the author's incredible body of work. Read it and be moved, skilled, guided and lifted....

Johnny says

As a young seminarian and pastor, I was profoundly affected by a book written by this psychologist, professor, and priest. As an old geezer, I was inspired by another book by the same author--an individual who practiced what he "preached" in that he left a prestigious position at Harvard and ended up fulfilled by ministering to a handful of mentally challenged individuals--trading influence on millions to influence on less than 10.

I suppose the secret can be found in a story he tells about talking to a trapeze artist whom he had enjoyed. This gracious priest seems to have gone all fan-boy on the trapeze artist and the following is what he learned:

"As a flyer, I must have complete trust in my catcher. The public might think that I am the great star of the trapeze, but the real star is Joe, my catcher. He has to be there for me with split-second precision and grab me out of the air as I come to him in the long jump. The secret is that the flyer does nothing and the catcher

does everything.” (pp. 148-9) “The worst thing the flyer can do is to try to catch the catcher. If I grab Joe’s wrists, I might break them, or he might break mine, and that would be the end of both of us.” (p. 148)

There is the authentic Christian life in parable. As a believer, I can do nothing, but my catcher can and has done everything. God as Jesus caught all my sins when I could do nothing about them. God as Spirit catches all my opportunities and potential and allows me to do the kinds of flips and jumps that enable me to experience the exhilaration of Christian life.

Henri Nouwen was never afraid to share out of his weakness in order to challenge some of us to get past our own weaknesses. Late in the book, he confesses to the following experience. He went to a psychiatrist after a friend betrayed him and sent him into deep depression. The psychiatrist said that he had gotten too deeply involved with this friend and that it would take about six months of grieving to get over it. The psychiatrist said he should never see the person again and dismissed his neurosis as being about a 2 on a scale of 10. To which Nouwen responded: “I’m not going to keep seeing you. You have me all figured out, my pain is all so simple to you, and I’m not going to see you anymore.” (pp. 121-2) He went on to say that he knew that forgiveness and reconciliation was the only way that he was going to get past all he was going through.

Early in the book, he told of complaining to Mother Teresa of how incredibly complicated and frustrating his life had become. She was not sympathetic: “Well, when you spend one hour a day adoring your Lord and never do anything which you know is wrong...you will be fine.” – (p. 5)

My favorite section of this book was the section on prayer. Three parts jump out at me. First, “Our inclination is to reveal to God only what we feel comfortable in sharing. ...We are often tempted to select carefully the thoughts that we bring into our conversation with God.” (p. 59) This is the “...road of spiritual censorship.” (p. 59)

Second, “To pray unceasingly, as St. Paul asks us to do, would be completely impossible if it meant to think constantly about or speak continuously to God. ...It means to think, speak, and live in the presence of God.” (p. 61)

Third, “Prayer is outward, careful attentiveness to the One who invites us to an unceasing conversation.” (p. 62)

My favorite quotation from the whole book would have to be the one on ministry, though. “Ministry is when two people toast their glasses of wine and something splashes over. Ministry is the extra.” (p. 131)

Spiritual Direction: Wisdom for the Long Walk of Faith isn't for everyone. It isn't for people who are willing to compartmentalize their faith and live as double-agents between the sacred and secular. This book isn't for people who want to keep God in a box of ideas with which they are comfortable. Finally, this book isn't for people who feel like they are already spiritually mature. This book is for people who are still becoming. And that's why it's for me.

Joe says

I have read many books by Henri Nouwen on Spirituality. This book is amazing because it offers an almost a "how-to" book on forming small groups to explore one's own spiritual journey. When he was a young priest, Henri Nouwen understood spiritual direction as a formal relationship for supervision and accountability between a mature spiritual leader and a new priest or minister. Later in life, he preferred the term "spiritual

friendship" or "soul friend." Anyone looking for spiritual direction with an idea of forming a group should take a look at this book. It is inspiring!

Ann Gemmel says

Such a wonderful read. As was suggested - it is one to read through initially and then go back and take a chapter at a time. So much to ponder. I particularly was both challenged and touched by the chapters on community and service. This really is one that all Christ followers should read at some point in their spiritual journey.

Edward Ortiz says

This book is a collection of articles, sermons, and other related works from the late Henri Nouwen, a catholic priest. The book is very interesting and informative but a word of caution for the readers. Some of Henri's views are problematic but overall it is a good book, specially in the area of living in community. The book starts with a definition for Spiritual direction, that states, "it is a relationship initiated by a spiritual seeker who finds a mature person of faith willing to pray and respond with wisdom and understanding to his or her questions about how to live spiritually in a world of ambiguity and distraction". In other words, a mentor. In this world with so much confusion and troubles, we sure need a godly person that can provide us with wisdom and help us in our walk with God.

The main point that in my opinion captures the essence of the book is the area of forgiveness. Community requires forgiveness. The book, states "that forgiveness means that I continually am willing to forgive the other person for not fulfilling all my needs and desires. Forgiveness says, "I know you love me, but you don't have to love me unconditionally, because only God can do that". I too must ask forgiveness for not being able to fulfill other people's total needs, for no human being can do that". In addition, "our heart longs for satisfaction, for total communion. But human beings, whether it's your husband, your wife, your father, mother, brother, sister, or child, are all limited in giving the level of love and acceptance we all crave. But since we want so much and we get only part of what we want, we have to keep on forgiving people for not giving us all we want. This is of enormous importance right now because constantly people look to blame their parents, their friends, and the church for not giving them what they need. Any relationship you enter into – will always be riddled with frustration and disappointment. So forgiveness becomes the word for divine love in the human context". I completely agree with his views in this area. We get in the habit of asking and expecting too much from the people that are close to us, or even the government. But I think it is important to understand that only God can fill the void inside of us. If we trust God and faithfully follow His word then all things are possible.

I recommend this book but again the reader must keep a discerning eye.

Jeff says

This is a wonderful little book on the topic of spiritual direction. The definition of "spiritual direction," as provided by the book is "a relationship initiated by a spiritual seeker who finds a mature person of faith

willing to pray and respond with wisdom and understanding to his or her questions about how to live spiritually in a world of ambiguity and distraction."

The chapters of the book all have questions for titles. "Who Will Answer My Questions?" "Where Do I Begin?" "Who Am I?" "Where Have I Been and Where Am I Going?" And so on.

The chapters are also broken down into parts: Look Within to the Heart, Look to God in the Book, and Look to Others in Community.

Each chapter begins with parable of sorts, all from different sources. I suppose some people would object to the fact that some of the parables are from different "religions." Personally, that doesn't bother me. Why can I not learn from the wisdom of other religions?

This book is the first that I have read of Nouwen's work, although I have heard about him for many years. I definitely want to read more. There is great spiritual wisdom to be found in his writings. And this book will most definitely be read again, more slowly, perhaps with journaling involved.

I think this is a great volume to read for one, like me, who is on the beginning paths of spiritual direction. One thing it made me realize for certain is that I need spiritual direction. Either that of a more mature believer or a group of people. I'm kind of leaning toward a group that will begin this journey together.

Jake Thurston says

Another Henri Nouwen classic. So clear and thought provoking, putting a fresh twist on so many things that are essential to the Christian life but often get forgotten. Highly recommend!

Elin Westöö says

Tog upp läsningen igen av den här boken och upptäckte att den verkligen talade till mig och var vad jag behövde. Henri Nouwen börjar med att beskriva hur viktigt det är att ta emot att man är älskad och fortsätter med den andliga vägledningen hur man möter Gud i Bibeln, i gemenskapen och i tjänandet. Kommer att läsa den här boken igen och vill gärna läsa mer av Henri Nouwen.

Brenda H. says

This posthumously written book still captures Nouwen's passion for ministry and spiritual formation. This book is filled with very approachable material and guidelines to implement these disciplines in your everyday life.