

COMPILED AND EDITED BY GABRIELLE EARNSHAW

HENRI J. M.  
NOUWEN

*365 Daily Readings and Meditations  
for Spiritual Living*

YOU ARE  
THE  
BELOVED

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A DEVOTIONAL

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*“Henri Nouwen’s timeless and loving words are quiet  
prayers that will forever live in my heart.”*

—BRENÉ BROWN



By Henri J. M. Nouwen

*You Are the Beloved*  
*The Return of the Prodigal Son*  
*The Wounded Healer*  
*Following Jesus*  
*The Way of the Heart*  
*The Inner Voice of Love*  
*Reaching Out*  
*Compassion*  
*The Genesee Diary*  
*The Road to Daybreak*  
*Lifesigns*  
*Out of Solitude*  
*Making All Things New*  
*With Open Hands*

YOU ARE THE BELOVED





# YOU ARE THE BELOVED

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*365 Daily Readings and Meditations  
for Spiritual Living*

*A devotional*

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HENRI J. M. NOUWEN

Compiled and Edited by Gabrielle Earnshaw



IMAGE  
NEW YORK

A Note to the Reader: Generally, the meditations have been drawn from first editions. However, when available, meditations come from revised editions that employ more inclusive language. Some meditations and scriptural passages remain with the language of the Father, based on Henri's understanding of the intimate familiar relationship. All editions used are listed in Works Cited. Other minor changes to the text have been made for clarity.

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Dedicated to Robert Durback



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## INTRODUCTION

by Gabrielle Earnshaw

This is a book of daily meditations, selected from the writings, talks, and letters of Henri Nouwen, some of which have never been published before. Taking time for daily meditation was crucial for Henri. It was his time to be present to God, to hear God speak to him.

Reading was an integral part of Henri's daily practice. He had a unique perspective on spiritual reading. In his book *Here and Now*, he wrote:

Spiritual reading is not only reading about spiritual people or spiritual things. It is also reading spiritually, that is, in a spiritual way! Reading in a spiritual way is reading with a desire to let God come closer to us. . . .

The purpose of spiritual reading . . . is not to master knowledge or information but to let God's Spirit master us. Strange as it may sound, spiritual reading means to let ourselves be read by God! . . .

Spiritual reading is reading with an inner attentiveness to the movement of God's Spirit in our outer and inner lives. With that attentiveness we will allow God to read us and to explain to us what we are truly about.

Henri Nouwen had a lifelong struggle with loneliness and anxiety, which at one point led to a downward spiral of self-rejection and despair. In the depths of his anguish, Henri made a conscious choice to spend a good part of every day in solitude, seeking God. The result was an epiphany: "*You are the Beloved of God.*" At first, he could barely hear these words, but gradually he learned to claim them, allowing this primal identity as a child of God to form roots in the soil of his heart. When he recovered, his talks and retreats

began to focus more on the immensity of God's compassion and love. In his book *Life of the Beloved*, he wrote:

All I want to say to you is "You are the Beloved," and all I hope is that you can hear these words as spoken to you with all the tenderness and force that love can hold. My only desire is to make these words reverberate in every corner of your being—"You are the Beloved."

While growing up, Henri heard two contradictory voices in his head about how to live. The first said, "Stay close to the heart of Jesus," and the other cautioned, "Be sure you are successful." Henri was not immune to the call of the secular world, which tells us through subtle and overt ways that we don't quite measure up. We are judged by the amount of money we earn, the number of friends we have, and how productive we are. What Henri heard in the depth of his struggle, however, was counterintuitive and radical—to reject a worldly identity and claim his place as God's Beloved.

In this book, Henri invites us to consider that we, too, are precious in God's sight. So much changes when we do. We become more interested in being than in doing; we bind our wounds rather than run from what causes us pain; we befriend death rather than deny it.

Henri found a new capacity for joy. By claiming his belovedness, he had more compassion for people who hurt him, more courage to live his struggles as gateways to inner freedom. He became more loving, and felt more at peace with himself and the world.

This book of daily meditations is an invitation to walk with Henri Nouwen to the center of your own heart where the soft, gentle voice of God can be heard, *You, too, are the Beloved*.

YOU ARE THE BELOVED



JANUARY



## A New Beginning!

We must learn to live each day, each hour, yes, each minute as a new beginning, as a unique opportunity to make everything new. Imagine that we could live each moment as a moment pregnant with new life. Imagine that we could live each day as a day full of promises. Imagine that we could walk through the new year always listening to the voice saying to us: "I have a gift for you and can't wait for you to see it!" Imagine.

Is it possible that our imagination can lead us to the truth of our lives? Yes, it can! The problem is that we allow our past, which becomes longer and longer each year, to say to us: "You know it all; you have seen it all, be realistic; the future will just be a repeat of the past. Try to survive it as best you can." There are many cunning foxes jumping on our shoulders and whispering in our ears the great lie: "There is nothing new under the sun . . . don't let yourself be fooled."

When we listen to these foxes, they eventually prove themselves right: our new year, our new day, our new hour become flat, boring, dull, and without anything new.

So what are we to do? First, we must send the foxes back to where they belong: in their foxholes. And then we must open our minds and our hearts to the voice that resounds through the valleys and hills of our life saying: "Let me show you where I live among my people. My name is 'God-with-you.' I will wipe all the tears from your eyes; there will be no more death, and no more mourning or sadness. The world of the past has gone" (see Revelation 21:2-5).

*Here and Now*

## Anchor Yourself in God's Love

When Jesus was baptized in the Jordan, he heard a voice from heaven saying, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17, NAB). These words revealed the true identity of Jesus as the beloved. Jesus truly heard that voice, and all of his thoughts, words, and actions came forth from his deep knowledge that he was infinitely loved by God. Jesus lived his life from that inner place of love. Although human rejections, jealousies, resentments, and hatred did hurt him deeply, he remained anchored in the love of the Father. At the end of his life, he said to his disciples, "Listen: the time will come—indeed has come already—when you are going to be scattered, each going his own way and leaving me alone. And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me" (John 16:32, TNJB).

I know now that the words spoken to Jesus when he was baptized are words spoken also to me and to all who are brothers and sisters of Jesus. My tendencies toward self-rejection and self-deprecation make it hard to hear these words truly and let them descend into the center of my heart. But once I have received these words fully, I am set free from my compulsion to prove myself to the world and can live in it without belonging to it. Once I have accepted the truth that I am God's beloved child, unconditionally loved, I can be sent into the world to speak and to act as Jesus did.

*Beyond the Mirror*

## Your Heart Is the Center of Your Being

In the biblical understanding, our heart is at the center of our being. It's not a muscle, but a symbol for the very center of our being. Now the beautiful thing about the heart is that the heart is the place where we are most ourselves. It is the very core of our being, the spiritual center of our being. Solitude and silence, for instance, are ways to get to the heart, because the heart is the place where God speaks to us, where we hear the voice that calls us beloved. This is precisely the most intimate place. In the famous story, Elijah was standing in front of the cave. God was not in the storm, God was not in the fire and not in the earthquake, but God was in that soft little voice (see 1 Kings 19:11–12). That soft little voice . . . speaks to the heart. Prayer and solitude are ways to listen to the voice that speaks to our heart, in the center of our being. One of the most amazing things is that if you enter deeper and deeper into that place, you not only meet God, but you meet the whole world there.

*Beloved: Henri Nouwen in Conversation*

## You Are Beloved

Personally, as my struggle reveals, I don't often "feel" like a beloved child of God. But I *know* that that is my most primal identity and I know that I must choose it above and beyond my hesitations.

Strong emotions, self-rejection, and even self-hatred justifiably toss you about, but you are free to respond as you will. You are *not* what others, or even you, think about yourself. You are *not* what you do. You are *not* what you have. You are a full member of the human family, having been known before you were conceived and molded in your mother's womb. In times when you feel bad about yourself, try to choose to remain true to the truth of who you really are. Look in the mirror each day and claim your true identity. Act ahead of your feelings and trust that one day your feelings will match your convictions. Choose now and continue to choose this incredible truth. As a spiritual practice claim and reclaim your primal identity as beloved daughter or son of a personal Creator.

*Home Tonight*

## Know That You Are Welcome

Not being welcome is your greatest fear. It connects with your birth fear, your fear of not being welcome in this life, and your death fear, your fear of not being welcome in the life after this. It is the deep-seated fear that it would have been better if you had not lived.

Here you are facing the core of the spiritual battle. Are you going to give in to the forces of darkness that say you are not welcome in this life, or can you trust the voice of the One who came not to condemn you but to set you free from fear? You have to choose life. At every moment you have to decide to trust the voice that says, “I love you. I knit you together in your mother’s womb” (see Psalm 139:13).

Everything Jesus is saying to you can be summarized in the words “Know that you are welcome.” Jesus offers you his own most intimate life with the Father.

*The Inner Voice of Love*

## Live Under the Blessing

When we lose a family member or friend through death, when we become jobless, when we fail an examination, when we live through a separation or a divorce, when a war breaks out, when an earthquake destroys our home or touches us, the question “Why?” spontaneously emerges. “Why me?” “Why now?” “Why here?” It is so arduous to live without an answer to this “Why?” that we are easily seduced into connecting the events over which we have no control with our conscious or unconscious evaluation. When we have cursed ourselves or allowed others to curse us, it is very tempting to explain all the brokenness we experience as an expression or confirmation of this curse. Before we fully realize it, we have already said to ourselves, “You see, I always thought I was no good. . . . Now I know for sure. The facts of life prove it.”

The great spiritual call of the Beloved Children of God is to pull their brokenness away from the shadow of the curse and put it under the light of the blessing. This is not as easy as it sounds. The power of the darkness around us is strong, and our world finds it easier to manipulate self-rejecting people than self-accepting people. But when we keep listening attentively to the voice calling us the Beloved, it becomes possible to live our brokenness, not as a confirmation of our fear that we are worthless, but as an opportunity to purify and deepen the blessing that rests upon us. Physical, mental, or emotional pain lived under the blessing is experienced in ways radically different from physical, mental, or emotional pain lived under the curse.

*Life of the Beloved*

## God Is a Compassionate God

The truly good news is that God is not a distant God, a God to be feared and avoided, a God of revenge, but a God who is moved by our pains and participates in the fullness of the human struggle. . . . God is a compassionate God. This means, first of all, that God is a God who has chosen to be God-with-us. . . . As soon as we call God “God-with-us,” we enter into a new relationship of intimacy with him. By calling God Emmanuel, we recognize God’s commitment to live in solidarity with us, to share our joys and pains, to defend and protect us, and to suffer all of life with us. The God-with-us is a close God, a God whom we call our refuge, our stronghold, our wisdom, and even, more intimately, our helper, our shepherd, our love. We will never really know God as a compassionate God if we do not understand with our heart and mind that “the Word became flesh and lived among us” (John 1:14, NRSV).

*Compassion*

## God Needs Me as Much as I Need God

It might sound strange, but God wants to find me as much as, if not more than, I want to find God. Yes, God needs me as much as I need God. God is not the patriarch who stays home, doesn't move, and expects his children to come to him, apologize for their aberrant behavior, beg for forgiveness, and promise to do better. To the contrary, he leaves the house, ignoring his dignity by running toward them, pays no heed to apologies and promises of change, and brings them to the table richly prepared for them.

I am beginning to now see how radically the character of my spiritual journey will change when I no longer think of God as hiding out and making it as difficult as possible for me to find him, but, instead, as the One who is looking for me while I am doing the hiding.

*The Return of the Prodigal Son*

## Surrender Yourself Completely to God's Love

I am growing in the awareness that God wants my whole life, not just part of it. It is not enough to give just so much time and attention to God and keep the rest for myself. It is not enough to pray often and deeply and then move from there to my own projects. . . .

To return to God means to return to God with all that I am and all that I have. I cannot return to God with just half of my being. As I reflected this morning again on the story of the prodigal son and tried to experience myself in the embrace of the father, I suddenly felt a certain resistance to being embraced so fully and totally. I experienced not only a desire to be embraced, but also a fear of losing my independence. I realized that God's love is a jealous love. God wants not just a part of me, but all of me. Only when I surrender myself completely to God's love can I expect to be free from endless distractions, ready to hear the voice of love, and able to recognize my own unique call.

*The Road to Daybreak*

## The Trap of Self-Rejection

Over the years, I have come to realize that the greatest trap in our life is not success, popularity, or power, but self-rejection. Success, popularity, and power can indeed present a great temptation, but their seductive quality often comes from the way they are part of the much larger temptation to self-rejection. When we have come to believe in the voices that call us worthless and unlovable, then success, popularity, and power are easily perceived as attractive solutions. The real trap, however, is self-rejection. . . . As soon as someone accuses me or criticizes me, as soon as I am rejected, left alone, or abandoned, I find myself thinking, “Well, that proves once again that I am a nobody.” . . . My dark side says, “I am no good. . . . I deserve to be pushed aside, forgotten, rejected, and abandoned.”

Self-rejection is the greatest enemy of the spiritual life because it contradicts the sacred voice that calls us the “Beloved.” Being the Beloved constitutes the core truth of our existence.

*Life of the Beloved*