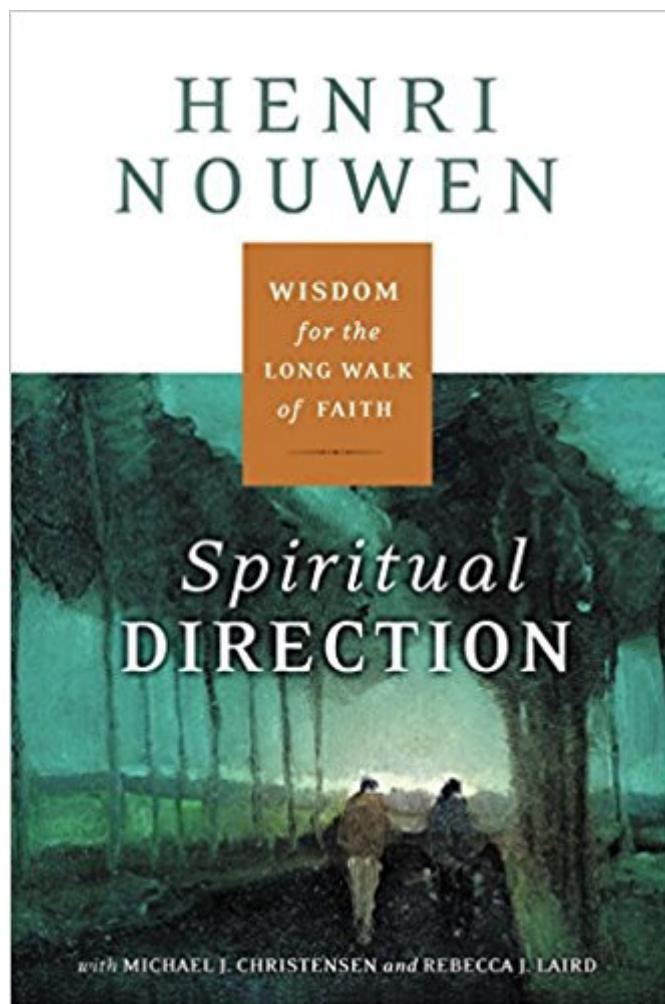


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Spiritual Direction: Wisdom For The Long Walk Of Faith



Synopsis

Henri Nouwen—beloved author, priest, and internationally recognized spiritual master, counselor, and guide—offers gentle wisdom for universal questions of the spiritual life: Who am I? Where have I been and where am I going? Who is God for me? Where do I belong? How can I be of service? As a priest, pastor, and professor of spirituality at Notre Dame, Yale, and Harvard, Nouwen offered spiritual direction to many students, but his famous course on spiritual direction was never recorded during his lifetime. Now, in *Spiritual Direction*, the first of a series, one of Nouwen's students (Michael Christensen) and one of his editors (Rebecca Laird) have developed his courses and practice of spiritual direction into a book of profound wisdom for living a deep spiritual life.

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Customer Reviews

Starred Review. It's a little jarring to see a new book from an author who's been dead for 10 years. Yet these clearly are the words and teachings of Nouwen, prepared by two people close to him when he was alive (Rebecca Laird and Michael Christensen). Much like Nouwen's *Making All Things New*, this is by a spiritual master for everyday people longing to be closer to God. It is not about how to become a spiritual friend, mentor or director, but focuses on ways individuals can find their spiritual direction in the broadest possible sense. Although there is an essay on what a spiritual director does, there is much more about how to pray, practice solitude and overcome the fears that keep us from knowing ourselves as God's beloved. Many Christians who struggle with the image of

a punishing God will appreciate the section on becoming attentive to and working with our image of God. Following each chapter there is a recommended spiritual practice and questions to ponder. This is a brilliant addition to Nouwen's canon of work as a writer and will enrich both longtime Nouwen fans and newcomers to his wisdom. (June) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Ã¢ "Read this book and you will understand why I chose Henri Nouwen as a companion on my own spiritual journey." (Bill Moyers)

This short book is definitely a book I would recommend to others to challenge them in the area of connecting with God and community. It is a book that is best read slowly and contemplatively with questions and reflections following each section to lead the reader toward application and not just information alone. Nouwen states, "The goal of spiritual direction is spiritual formation-the ever increasing capacity to live a spiritual life from the heart. A spiritual life cannot be formed without discipline, practice and accountability." The book focuses on three classic disciplines or spiritual practices that are useful in the spiritual direction relationship. They can help create space for God within us: 1. the discipline of the Heart, 2. the discipline of the Book, and 3. the discipline of the Church or community of faith. Together these spiritual practices help us overcome our resistances to contemplative listening and active obedience to God and free us to live an embodied and fulfilled spiritual life. Great book, read my full review here: [...]

I am interested in becoming a spiritual director and wanted to find some good books on the subject and this book has not failed in bringing me the insight I was looking for in this field. I am not even half way into the book and I can't rave enough of the inspiration of right to the point knowledge of Henri Nouwen on the topic of spiritual direction. So much wisdom in such a small 200 page book. I love it!

Henri Nouwen's pull on God was a stunner, activating my Spirit as my walk of faith became a journey of discoveries unlocking me to places I had yet to discover in the heart of God. This book is a slow-drip read that if you are open will be a door to discovering God's wisdom for the long walk of faith.

In the course of life, we all seek out a licensed physician to address acute physical needs, or

chronic conditions that plague our desired quality of life. To do otherwise, would invite the oft painful or potentially fatal consequences. Few would neglect the physical needs of the body. However, it is equally important to recognize the spiritual aspects of human life. Broadly speaking, discussion around personality, soul, and psyche are all aspects of the spiritual self. Yet, when is the last time that you went to a Spiritual Director for soul care? Is it any less important? Consider the individual who is a superb physical specimen - in perfect health, but has lost hope altogether. Clearly, there are countless many that are physically healthy, but spiritually shipwrecked. Tragically, many who find themselves in this condition are unable to face another day and choose to escape the incessant pain with a preemptive shot to the head. Others lack the courage and seek to self-medicate through illegal drugs, excessive quantities of alcohol, or some other 'aid' to escape the encompassing darkness and painful reality of life. Interestingly enough, there is increased interest in the realm of the spiritual in our culture today. What we desperately need are physicians of the soul. Spiritual Direction is an engaging look into this whole matter of life in the spiritual realm. Questions like, "Who am I? - Where have I come from? - And where am I going? - What is prayer? - Who is God for me? - How does God speak to me? - Where do I belong?" are typical inquiries in a session with an effective Spiritual Director. Informally, this relationship becomes a spiritual friendship, or what is commonly understood as a soul friend. Nouwen would define this friendship as, "... 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." He argues that solitude is needed to know God, but that this must be balanced in faithful community with a degree of accountability. Let's face it - we all need guides in this life. Human vulnerability is a key area of discovery in an effective SD relationship where someone comes alongside another in their restless search for meaning or direction. The SD does not necessarily know the particular answers, but is willing and able to assist in the search. As a spiritual director, although at times weak and limited, Nouwen would argue this relationship conveys, "... we are not alone. Where there is charity and love, God is there." There is something about having someone join us in the search that brings tremendous comfort. The Bible is clear in stating that, "there is wisdom in the council of many." As spiritual beings, it is critical to recognize that spiritual formation, or the work of God, is taking place in each of us. He is the master sculptor at work. To submit to Him is to be open to what He is doing, even if the process brings discomfort. It is not uncommon for a family physician to prescribe treatment that is uncomfortable, painful, or inconvenient. Again, should any less be granted to our Heavenly Father for His purposes? As a loving Father, He can be trusted. The ability to listen to God is critical in making sense of our

spiritual lives and His perfect will for us. A willingness to respond in obedience is another dimension altogether in living the Christian life successfully. The role of a SD continually walks alongside his directee in times of compusiveness and helps identify potentially false approaches or temptations in finding satisfaction in life. False hope is lurking and marketed all about us. The voices clamor from the hilltops of social media, "read this book!", "take this trip!", "apply for this job!", or "find the relationship you've been looking for!" At times of vulnerability, the effective SD will help his directee find clarity at times when he might otherwise fall for such techniques. At these times, Nouwen invites the would be victim to return to the open and accepting arms of His God. Quoting Augustine, as he expressed his heart during such times, "My soul is restless until it rests in you, O God," capture well this journey. That I am always searching for God, always struggling to discover the fullness of Love, and always yearning for the complete truth, tells me that I have already been given a taste of God, of Love, and of Truth. I can only look for something that I have, to some degree, already found." This gets us back to Milton's Paradise Lost scenario where we are always searching, never to gain admittance in the garden again - and yet loved by our heavenly Father. Community is instrumental in Nouwen's SD model, but sets a realistic perspective on what can hopefully be achieved. He state, "Community is not some sentimental ideal place or time where everybody lives together, loves each other, and always gets along ... that's never going to happen." Rather, he suggests that in this context, we learn to accept one another and receive the love and care of others. At the same time, this is not to be viewed as a substitute for a meaningful relationship with God. Nouwen argues, "Community is solitude greeting solitude," but beloved of God, nonetheless. In closing, a powerful idea that Nouwen brings to bear in his experience hinges upon the concept of forgiveness. When asked, Nouwen states that forgiveness, "... means that I continually am willing to forgive the other person for not fulfilling all my needs and desires. This is a rather profound consideration based upon the implications of our relationship with God. He further states, "Forgiveness says, 'I know you love me, but you don't have to love me unconditionally, because only God can do that.'" At the same time, he states we must be willing to ask for forgiveness because we, "... are not able to fulfill other people's total needs, for no human being can do that." Essentially, he would state, "We need to forgive one another for not being God!" This is incredibly powerful. The impact of this book upon me has been immeasurable and continues to burn in my soul. Not only am I in pursuit of a SD such as Nouwen (now deceased), but I aspire to be this type of person - a physician of the soul. One who sees himself as a "wounded healer who looks after our own wounds and at the same time prepares to heal the wounds of others." We are indebted to Nouwen for his incredible spiritual insight and compassion for his fellow-man.

Spiritual Direction: Wisdom for the Long Walk of Faith is a compilation of the writings and lectures of Henri Nouwen, the late professor, spiritual director, and member of Daybreak L'Arche community in Toronto. Nouwen is renowned in the literature of spiritual formation, and his writing career was prolific, but none of his works speak directly to spiritual direction. Michael Christensen and Rebecca Laird set out to remedy this hole in the Nouwen bibliography by pulling together articles, recording, notes, and unpublished writings that speak to this topic. The result is a most helpful resource to those who want to grow in the Christian faith and a deeper relationship with God. The work is divided into three primary sections that deal with spiritual formation as disciplines of the heart, the Word, and the community. All three were essential in Nouwen's approach to spiritual formation. Each chapter begins with a parable, used by Nouwen, to provoke thought and discussion, but also to illuminate some of the mysterious steps in growing spiritually. What follows is a discussion of the discipline and then a practical guide to allowing this discipline to grow in our lives. The book has a conversational quality that draws the reader in to the mind and heart of Henri Nouwen. It is as if he is answering the questions that we have always wanted to ask of someone this wise and steeped in his pursuit of God, or as Nouwen himself puts it, in allowing God to find him.

This book is a gem for both practical and mystical guidance. The narrative informs and entertains while the practices offer insights and tools to make the learning come alive.

Henri Nouwen's writings are always well worth reading!

Excellent!

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