

READING AND DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR

Making All Things New: An Invitation to the Spiritual Life

by

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Making All Things New is Nouwen's answer to two questions: "What is the spiritual life?" and "How do I live it?" He describes why we so desperately need to pursue the spiritual life, which he contrasts with a life of worry, and gives practical advice about engaging in the spiritual life through the complementary disciplines of solitude and community.

INTRODUCTION

1. Henri Nouwen writes, "Worrying has become such a part and parcel of our daily life that a life without wor-

ries seems not only impossible, but even undesirable” (p. 15). Have you accepted worries as an essential, perhaps even desirable, part of your life? Explain. What might a life without worries look like?

CHAPTER 1 ALL THESE OTHER THINGS

1. Why do many of us place such a premium on being perceived as busy (p. 24)? Is it important to you to be thought of this way? Why or why not?
2. What are some of the preoccupations, the “what-ifs,” that fill your life? In what ways might those “what-ifs” be holding you back?
3. Nouwen writes, “The great paradox of our time is that many of us are busy and bored at the same time” (p. 30). How can someone be both busy and bored? Does this describe you? Explain.
4. What larger problem is at the root of boredom, resentment, and depression? How does this problem manifest itself in your life?

CHAPTER 2 HIS KINGDOM FIRST

1. “It is important for us to realize that Jesus in no way wants us to leave our many-faceted world. Rather, he

wants us to live in it, but firmly rooted in the center of all things” (p. 42). How does living in the center, living in God’s kingdom, differ from a life of retreat from the world?

2. According to Nouwen, Jesus’s obedience to his Father, “a total, fearless listening to his loving Father” (p. 47), was at the center of his life. Does anything about this definition of obedience differ from how you generally view obedience? How is obeying God related to our love for God and God’s love for us?
3. Jesus “became like us so that we might become like him” (p. 52). Do you truly believe your life can become like the life of Jesus? How does the way you answer this question affect how you live your life?
4. Nouwen describes the spiritual life using Jesus’s words: “being in the world without being of the world” (p. 56). What are some ways the spiritual life differs from a life of the world, according to Nouwen? How has your experience of the spiritual life been similar to or different from Nouwen’s description?
5. Nouwen tells us that living the spiritual life requires a change of heart, a conversion (p. 57). Have you experienced such a change? If so, was it a sudden inner change or a longer period of transformation? Explain.

CHAPTER 3 SET YOUR HEARTS

1. Throughout *Making All Things New*, Nouwen contrasts the spiritual life with the worry-filled life. What is it about worry that puts it in conflict with the life lived with God?
2. “A spiritual discipline is necessary in order to move slowly from an absurd to an obedient life, from a life filled with noisy worries to a life in which there is some free inner space where we can listen to our God and follow his guidance” (pp. 67–68). What in your life is absurd and noisy, preventing you from listening to God?
3. “[The] desire for solitude is often the first sign of prayer” (p. 74). Yet, Nouwen explains, even when we desire solitude, we may still fear the “inner chaos” it can open in us when we are no longer distracted by outside things (p. 70). What has been your experience in practicing solitude? Do you find yourself longing for times of solitude or dreading solitude? If you have practiced solitude in the past, what kind of effect has it had on your life?
4. Nouwen refers to solitude as “quiet dwelling with God” (p. 78), but such a practice can take many forms. What forms of solitude, such as having a “ready place” and using scripture to focus, or taking a nature walk, or repeating short prayers (pp. 77–78), have worked for you in the past? What kinds would you like to try?

5. What is the difference between solitude as Nouwen describes it and simply being alone?
6. Nouwen insists on the importance of committing to a regular practice of solitude and recommends many practical steps to make this discipline part of our lives, from setting realistic time goals to marking the time down on our calendars. What steps can you take to make solitude a planned part of your schedule?
7. How does the discipline of community dovetail with the discipline of solitude (pp. 80–81)? Which discipline comes more easily to you?
8. Nouwen makes it clear that a Christian community is one in which we embrace all people, not just those with whom we are compatible. When have you struggled to find community with someone very unlike you? When has someone in your community given you a new view on the mystery of God's presence in your life (p. 87)?
9. Have you ever practiced the discipline Nouwen describes of listening together (pp. 83–86)? If so, what was your experience? If not, how might you try this community practice?
10. How can we experience community even when we are physically alone (p. 88)? Have you ever experienced community with someone from another time or place? Explain.

CONCLUSION

1. How has Nouwen's discussion affected your view of the spiritual life? What steps might you take now to better set your heart on God's kingdom?