

8/9/22 Tuesday Group

Henri Nouwen on loneliness & solitude

Henri Nouwen was a Dutch Catholic priest. After nearly two decades of teaching at academic institutions including the University of Notre Dame, Yale Divinity School and Harvard Divinity School, Nouwen went on to work with individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities at the L'Arche Daybreak community in Richmond Hill, Ontario. He was a prolific writer and one of his books, "Reaching Out", discusses three movements of the spiritual life.

"All human beings are alone. No other person will completely feel like we do, think like we do, act like we do. Each of us is unique, and our aloneness is the other side of our uniqueness. The question is whether we let our aloneness become loneliness or whether we allow it to lead us into solitude. Loneliness is painful; solitude is peaceful. Loneliness makes us cling to others in desperation; solitude allows us to respect others in their uniqueness and create community.

"Letting our aloneness grow into solitude and not into loneliness is a lifelong struggle. It requires conscious choices about whom to be with, what to study, how to pray, and when to ask for counsel. But wise choices will help us to find the solitude where our hearts can grow in love."

"The movement from loneliness to solitude, however, is the beginning of any spiritual life because it is a movement from the restless senses to the restful spirit, from the outward-reaching cravings to the inward-reaching search, from the fearful clinging to the fearless play."

"This desire for solitude is often the first sign of prayer, the first indication that the presence of God's Spirit no longer remains unnoticed. As we empty ourselves of our many worries, we come to know not only with our mind but also with our heart that we never were really alone, that God's Spirit was with us all along."

Queries

Head: Was there a phrase or nudge that spoke to you in these quotes?

Heart: Where do you sense you might be today on the continuum between loneliness and solitude? How do you feel about where you sense you are?

So What: If you sense an invitation to move towards the solitude end of the spectrum what are some practices that might help? How might this discussion and/or the quotes influence your life?