



In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership

Henri J.M. Nouwen

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Henri Nouwen was a spiritual thinker with an unusual capacity to write about the life of Jesus and the love of God in ways that have inspired countless people to trust life more fully. Most widely read among the over 40 books Father Nouwen wrote is *In the Name of Jesus*. For a society that measures successful leadership in terms of the effectiveness of the individual, Father Nouwen offers a counter definition that is witnessed by a "communal and mutual experience." For Nouwen, leadership cannot function apart from the community. His wisdom is grounded in the foundation that we are a people "called." This beautiful guide to Christian Leadership is the rich fruit of Henri Nouwen's own journey as one of the most influential spiritual leaders of the 20th century.

In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership Details

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From Reader Review In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership for online ebook

Bill Russell says

Fr. Nouwen is masterful. He presents a version of Christian faith that is very different than the evangelical American brand I learned. It is rich and true to Jesus. His advice for leaders in this century is profound. The only slight thing that bothered me was the notion that Nouwen was sacrificing much by living among the profoundly disabled. The rewards of such a leading always outweighs the cost.

Jeice says

This was an okay book, 2.5 stars I'd give it. It started off with me bracing myself to roll my eyes because my last outing with Henri Nouwen went pretty horribly (see my [Life of the Beloved](#) review). After getting over my initial trepidation, I actually got my hopes up that this book would be a catalyst for some deep soul work after reading a very thought-provoking and challenging chapter! Unfortunately, the next chapter put a damper on that hope, and for the most part a lot of my issues with Nouwen's style did end up rearing their flowery, unclear, well-intentioned-but-ultimately-unhelpful-and-impractical heads. Nothing in the book made me want to rage-quit it or need to take breaks this time, so that was a plus. Even still, there were just too many passages where Nouwen would triumphantly make a claim like he thought he had just proved or revealed something amazing that left me wanting. Also, he's not a researcher and doesn't claim to be, but he kind of pretends to be. He made sweeping generalizations about the state of affairs of the church and leadership that were clearly his own personal experience and then go on to state something to effect of, "So you see, the Christian leader of the future must become like such and such." Dude, your generalization wasn't even (in my experience) generally true! An example of a similar problem is when he asserts that "the original meaning of theology was union with God in prayer." Uh....WHAT?! Unless everything I or anyone I've ever talked to has been lied to about the way words and etymology work, that's not at all the original meaning of "God-study." You can't (or shouldn't) just be making things up to make your point, even if it does match your flowery, unclear, well-intentioned-but-ultimately-unhelpful-and-impractical aesthetic.

Anyways, I'm giving it 1 star for not saying anything so profoundly unhelpful/borderline heretical that it made me want to rage-quit too often, 1 star for the really good chapter that got my hopes up, and .5 stars for the scattering of good thoughts in the other chapters. Also, it was a super quick and easy read, so that's a plus too.

I'm writing this review off of my memory of the book, so I may come back and edit this later.

Pablo Palet Arandeda says

Ante las tres tentaciones de sentirse importante, ser espectacular y tener poder, Jesús pregunta "¿me amas?", entrega la tarea de "apacentar las ovejas", y el desafío de que "otro te conducirá. Sólo la práctica de la oración contemplativa, la confesión y el perdón, y la reflexión teológica hacen creíble al líder cristiano del siglo XXI.

Me llamó la atención sobretodo el entender el liderazgo no como el pastor que guía las ovejas, sino como el que sirve al rebaño haciéndose parte de él, vulnerable, reconociéndose pecador como todos, desentrañando en la realidad el modo en que Dios va guiando, sanando, construyendo su Reino.

James says

Through the lens of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness, and his commissioning of Peter at the end of John's gospel, Nouwen sets a trajectory for Christian leadership. He wrote this book after leaving academia for L'Arche and one of the best parts of the book is his description of how Bill, a developmentally disabled man, shared in Nouwen's ministry in presenting this material in Washington, D.C.

Nouwen questions contemporary leadership culture and the chasing of relevance, popularity and power. I wonder how Nouwen would critique social media. This short book is one of my favorites from Nouwen.

Linda Parker says

Appreciated his reflections and notes on servant leadership

Mollie Reads says

Glad to return to this foundational book on Christian leadership. It's so simple, but so full of truth bombs.

Jim B says

This is just a brief (one hour) reflection written because Nouwen was asked to speak about Christian leadership "in the Twenty-First Century."

It's a puzzling assignment given to a priest who lived in a community of people with disabilities for the last decade of his life (he got the assignment about year 3 of that decade).

I related to the author because the book is about caring for people over other agendas, and it is focused on Jesus, using the two stories of the temptation of Christ and Jesus reinstating Peter by asking "Do you love me?" Rightly, Nouwen points out that Jesus passed by a lot of what we call leadership today, and love and mercy were key to all His interactions.

On the one hand, I found the book a little frustrating. When I was younger, I would have embraced the point of this book as a justification for my lack of leadership -- "I'm just busy loving and taking care of people." That's a core part of Christian sanctification, but if you are called to lead, you have responsibilities that if neglected will harm either the people you love or exclude people that should have been served. At a key time in my life I kept asking people what it is to be a leader and many Christians were unable to answer that question, yet I could see that where a Christian leader actually led, more ministry occurred. Not just activity, but ministry.

More occurred, for one thing, because a leader "equips" people for works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up (Ephesians 4:12). Jesus equipped His disciples for works of service and look what happened! Nouwen doesn't deal with some key parts of Christian leadership.

On the other hand, Nouwen's experience is a true antidote to the tendency to define leadership in terms the world can understand. I've seen groups of Christians "leading" with their strategies, long range plans, and statistical analysis that leaves everything truly "Jesus" out -- in fact, they weren't into the Word and didn't take a lot of time for prayer. Nouwen embraces being "irrelevant" by the world's standards while being sure to follow Jesus. It may not be leadership in all its fullness, but it helps keep a Christian from the very leadership that Jesus forbade His people when He said, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves." (Luke 22:25-26)

Kelsey Hansen says

One of the most powerful books I have read! As a period of consistency, and even a little bit of comfort comes to an end, I am realizing more of who I am and who I was created to be. This book helped me connect the dots, and somewhat make sense of how to navigate transitional moments and times. I often forget my call to be vulnerable and to continue to go into spaces that force me to be uncomfortable. As organized ministry may die down, having a heart for knowing Jesus more will not. Jesus is after all, continually after the renewal and growth of my heart. In times of not knowing, I am reminded that my identity is not in my own understanding or only what I can see. My identity is solely in the truth that I am redeemed and because of that, I am then sent as a powerful, celebrated daughter.

Neil Coulter says

After reading Henri Nouwen's *The Way of the Heart* recently during some times of fasting, I decided to move on to another book by Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus*. I liked it perhaps even more than *The Way of the Heart*. The book is a version of an address Nouwen gave to an event in Washington, D.C., sometime in the 1980s. It's written specifically to Christian leaders, but the content is relevant to any Christian.

Nouwen gazes into the future and imagines what will be most significant for Christian leaders in the 21st century. In answer, he contemplates three shifts in focus for Christ-centered leadership: from relevance to prayer; from popularity to ministry; and from leading to being led. Along the way, Nouwen considers his own life, and especially the big change from teaching at Harvard to caring for the mentally ill at L'Arche. He also wrestles with simply getting older, and wondering if he has become the person he thinks he should be:

After twenty-five years of priesthood, I found myself praying poorly, living somewhat isolated from other people, and very much preoccupied with burning issues. Everyone was saying that I was doing really well, but something inside was telling me that my success was putting my own soul in danger. . . . In the midst of this I kept praying, "Lord, show me where you want me to go and I will follow you, but please be clear and unambiguous about it!" (20, 22)

Any book that opens with something like that is going to make me take notice, since that's basically how I feel these days myself.

In the first section, "From Relevance to Prayer," Nouwen expresses his frustration that seeing the needs of

the world is never enough. Of *course* there are people who need to be fed, but it's not possible for me to do it all! He relates this to the devil's temptation of Jesus to turn stones to bread. Our temptation is to do market research to identify exactly what people need, and then make it happen—thus making ourselves, our ministry, "relevant" by meeting people exactly where they are. Nouwen proposes instead that Jesus's first question was not "Have you solved all the world's problems today?" but "Do you love me?" Our goal, then, isn't figuring everything out and fixing it, but seeking "union with God in prayer" (the original meaning of the word "theology"). The challenge for Christians is to reaffirm through contemplative prayer, again and again, the answer to Jesus's question: Yes, Lord, I love you. We move ourselves away from dogmatic, political, us-vs.-them rhetoric, and toward simple love and devotion and real conversation—as Nouwen says, "a movement from the moral to the mystical" (47).

Writing about "From Popularity to Ministry," Nouwen looks at the second temptation of Jesus, to throw himself down from the top of the temple and be rescued by angels. For Christians today, that is the temptation to be spectacular, to be a superstar. This isolates us, removing us from situations in which we might satisfy our ever-present need to share confession and forgiveness with others. It's true that Jesus then told Peter to "Feed my lambs"—but he sent the disciples out in pairs, not alone.

The final section of the book, "From Leading to Being Led," is about giving up control. Nouwen says he became "aware of the extent to which my leadership was still a desire to control complex situations, confused emotions, and anxious minds" (74). He continues,

One of the greatest ironies of the history of Christianity is that its leaders constantly gave in to the temptation of power—political power, military power, economic power, or moral and spiritual power—even though they continued to speak in the name of Jesus, who did not cling to his divine power but emptied himself and became as we are. . . . Every time we see a major crisis in the history of the church . . . we always see that a major cause of rupture is the power exercised by those who claim to be followers of the poor and powerless Jesus. (76-77)

The answer is leadership guided more by theological reflection than by psychology. "Theological reflection is reflecting on the painful and joyful realities of every day with the mind of Jesus and thereby raising human consciousness to the knowledge of God's gentle guidance" (88).

This is a wonderful book, which I'm sure I'll return to, and hopeful that I will incorporate into my actual life. I need it. I respect Nouwen a lot. There aren't many people in the world I respect so highly, and most of them, like Nouwen, are dead. Which would be even more disappointing if some of those people hadn't left traces of their thoughts through words on the page. I'm grateful for those pages and those thoughts.

Damian Chandler says

Must read again and again

Jay Hawes says

Nouwen's writing is so powerful! Humility just drips from every word. He desires, more than anything, that Jesus would be more so he could become less. I was so impressed with this little book on leadership.

He challenges the reader:

1. Do you want to be relevant? Pray more.

The Christian leader of the future is called to be completely irrelevant and to stand in this world with nothing to offer but his or her own vulnerable self. That is the way Jesus came to reveal God's love. (30)

2. Do you want to be popular? Minister more.

It is Jesus who heals, not I; Jesus who speaks words of truth, not I; Jesus who is Lord, not I. (60)

3. Do you want to lead? Be led more.

What makes the temptation of power so seemingly irresistible? Maybe it is that power offers an easy substitute for the hard task of love. (77)

This will be a book I come back to year after year to remind myself as a leader that I need to be led.

Matt says

Loved it as a succinct and true treatise on Christian Leadership. A whole bunch of books have been written about "servant leadership," and many of them have been given to me over the years. Now I know where the other books were drawing inspiration. This one doesn't say too much or too little, and the incorporation of Nouwen's personal stories make it authentic and memorable.

Austin Mcgrath says

I had to read this for a group in my church, There are some biblical truths in this book, however nothing new or unordinary. In this book he makes some cringy/questionable statements like "we have to be mystics" "we have to be the incarnation" and abandons some definitions of words similar to Rob Bell. Like bad definition of what a mystic actually is or what theology is. He also claims theologians find it hard to pray. If you want an excellent book on Christian leadership I would not recommend this book, he seems very confused on what terms mean, different denominations, etc. Perhaps pick up an Albert Mohler book on leadership,

Mark Stevens says

The single greatest book on leadership I have ever read!

Mike Jorgensen says

I read this for a course and admittedly against my will. It starts off a little slow, but there were multiple points throughout the book where I had to stop and admire his ability to articulate things I've always thought, point out things I'd never see, and challenge me in ways I hadn't expected.
