



THE FATHER'S
LOVE

ADVENT DEVOTIONS

INSPIRATION FROM

HENRI J. M. NOUWEN

First Sunday of Advent

YES!

The writings of Henri J. M. Nouwen presented on the following pages are just a taste of the enriching, profound and spiritually moving works that he created over his decades of writing.

Nouwen (1932-1996) was a prolific author whose words and insights helped millions better understand that they have been created by a loving Father who wants them to stay close to him always. In this Advent season, setting aside time to sit quietly with God and pray is an ideal way to prepare ourselves to welcome Jesus at Christmas. Because of the Father's love for each of us, he sent his only Son to be our Redeemer. The Father, through Jesus, has given us the opportunity to spend eternity with him.

Each day of Advent, a Scripture verse, a select excerpt of Nouwen's writing, an original reflection based on that excerpt and a short prayer are presented.

Through his voluminous writings, Henri Nouwen carved a clear path for us to follow as we seek to enrich our relationship with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. We present some of these materials to you, our readers, in the hope that they will serve as an aid for you on that path.

Terence Hegarty, editor

You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name.

John 15:16

O, Lord, all you ask of me is a simple, "yes," a simple act of trust, so that your choices for me can bear fruit in my life. I do not want you to pass me by. I do not want to be so busy with my way of living, my plans and projects, my relatives, friends and acquaintances, that I do not even notice that you are with me, closer to me than anyone else.

We often find ourselves overwhelmed during the busy Christmas season. We spend endless hours shopping and baking and decorating. There are choir concerts and special worship services to attend. We invite guests into our homes and host parties. Do we have to say "yes" to everything and everyone? Well, yes, we must say "yes" to at least one invitation, and that is the invitation of our Lord, the Child of Bethlehem. He quietly asks us to say "yes" to him, to trust his Word and his promises so that through faith in his name, we will bear the fruit of love and service that brings glory to the Heavenly Father. So, even in this very busy and exciting season, we are empowered by the Holy Spirit to say "yes" to our Lord Jesus Christ because, in him, "every one of God's promises is a 'Yes'" (2 Corinthians 1:20).

Lord, you are the "Yes" to God's promises. Help us to express our "yes" to you in works of love and service.

Monday, First Week of Advent

HIS HEART

As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

John 17:21

Dear Lord Jesus...Through your human heart we can catch a glimpse of the divine love with which we are loved and with which you yourself love us, because you and your Father are one.

A tiny heart began beating in the womb of the virgin from Nazareth. The same little heart beat steadily as Mary's son slept on the hay in a manger in Bethlehem. In that infant heart, "all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell" (Colossians 1:19). The Child of Bethlehem, Jesus our Lord, grew to adulthood, his beating heart filled with the boundless love of his heavenly Father. Jesus, one with his Father, healed the sick, made the deaf hear and the blind see. He cast out evil spirits and fed the multitudes. When the time was right, the Son carried out his Father's purpose and took up the cross. Nailed to the cross, Jesus took our sentence of death onto himself, and that compassionate heart ceased its steady beat. Then, on the morning of the third day, his heart once again took up its strong, eternal rhythm. And we have the opportunity to one day, through faith in Jesus Christ, be folded to his breast to hear for all eternity the steady beat of that great and loving heart.

Heavenly Father, help us to reflect your love in our lives each day.

Tuesday, First Week of Advent

OVERFLOWING PRAISE

For it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks.

Luke 6:45

Our prayer emerges in the midst of our lives and is interwoven with everything else that busies our day. Whatever fills the heart is what the mouth pours forth. This is also true prayer.

When Mary, the Mother of our Lord, learned that she was to bear the Messiah, her heart overflowed with praise for the God of Israel: "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior" (Luke 1:46-47). As we prepare to celebrate the Savior's birth, our hearts overflow as well. Sometimes our hearts and prayers do not overflow with joyful praise, but with the busy concerns of the day and frantic pleas to God for help and peace. We may be filled with failure, fear and doubt, begging God to forgive us and heal us with his comforting presence. God hears the prayers we pour out before his throne. Our Lord Jesus, the son of Mary and Son of God, was born among us to save us. Jesus poured out his lifeblood on the cross to bring us forgiveness and peace with God. With hearts overflowing in grateful praise, we join Mary during this Advent season and rejoice in God our Savior!

Almighty God, now and for all eternity, we will praise you for the gift of your Son!

Wednesday, First Week of Advent

LOVE REVEALED

God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.

1 John 4:9-10

Dear Lord Jesus...your Father's love was so unlimited that he wanted us to know that love and to find in it the fulfillment of our deepest desires. So he sent us you, with a human heart big enough to hold all human loneliness and all human anguish. Your heart is not a heart of stone, but a heart of flesh; your heart of flesh is not narrowed by human sin and unfaithfulness, but is as wide and deep as divine love itself.

Scripture tells us, "God is love" (1 John 4:16). The God who is love was revealed among us when he sent his Son into the world. The world in which God revealed himself was not a kind and receptive place. It was, and is, a world lost in sin and rebellion against its Creator. But that is the world God loved, and that is the world—our world—into which he sent his Son. In Jesus, the holy Child of Bethlehem, the God who is love was revealed among us as one of us. The loving heart of Jesus was, and is, the loving heart of God himself, the loving heart of God in human flesh. Finally, his soul sorrowful and his heart weighed down by human guilt and shame, Jesus carried our sins in his own body to the cross. There on that cross, the loving heart of God was revealed for the world to see.

Lord, through this Advent season and beyond, lead us to walk in love.

Thursday, First Week of Advent

POSSIBLE

If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

1 John 1:9

Maybe someone will say to you, "You have to forgive yourself." But that isn't possible. What is possible is to open your hands without fear, so that the One who loves you can blow your sins away. Then the coins you considered indispensable for your life prove to be little more than light dust that a soft breeze will whirl away, leaving only a grin or a chuckle behind. Then you feel a bit of new freedom and praying becomes a joy, a spontaneous reaction to the world and the people around you.

We cannot forgive ourselves, even though well-intended people may advise us to do so. We cannot remove the stain of sin from our lives, and we could never do enough to earn God's favor. It is impossible for us to save ourselves. But as Jesus told his disciples, "What is impossible for mortals is possible for God" (Luke 18:27). God loves us and sent his Son to be our Savior. Our Lord Jesus took onto himself the stain of our sin and guilt. He suffered and died and rose up from death to win for us forgiveness and eternal life. The holy Child who slept in a manger in Bethlehem grew up to do the impossible. For what was impossible for us was possible for the Son of God. For as the angel Gabriel told Mary, who expressed astonished wonder about the miracle of her Son's birth, "Nothing will be impossible with God" (Luke 1:37).

Lord Jesus, you have done what we could never do; you have brought us into your kingdom!

THE FATHER'S LOVE

for each and every one of us is immeasurable. And we are called, especially in Advent, to prepare to receive that love, to share it and to demonstrate it as best we can. Henri Nouwen, a spiritual icon of the twentieth century, wrote about that love for decades in insightful and inspiring writings that continue to captivate millions of readers.

Excerpts of Nouwen's writings, as well as Scripture passages and original reflections and prayers within *The Father's Love*, will strengthen your Advent journey. With this booklet as your aid, allow yourself to be guided through daily prayer and reflection as you gain a better sense of how the Father loves us and why he sent his only Son to dwell among us.