



THE JOY OF SALVATION

LENTEN DEVOTIONS

INSPIRATION FROM

HENRI J. M. NOUWEN

THE JOY OF SALVATION

ASH WEDNESDAY

CALLING BACK

Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love ...

Joel 2:13

Please, Lord, keep calling me back to you, by day and by night, in joy and sadness, during moments of success and moments of failure. Never let me leave you.
(Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Heart Speaks to Heart*, 29)

Gracious God, I am forever grateful that you will never reject me or forsake me. Never let me leave you. Amen.

THURSDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY

COME TO HIM

Come to me, all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.

Matthew 11:28

Your heart is open to receive anyone with total, unrestricted love. For anyone who wants to come to you, there is room. You want to draw all people to yourself and offer them a home where every human longing comes to rest and every human need is satisfied. (Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Heart Speaks to Heart*, 22)

I thank you that you never tire of my coming to you, seeking rest for my soul. I am giving you my burdens to carry. Amen.

FRIDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY
 SPRING CLEANING

Hide your face from my sins,
 and blot out all my iniquities.
 Create in me a clean heart, O God,
 and put a new and right spirit within me. ...
 Restore to me the joy of your salvation ...

Psalm 51:9-10, 12

*To wait patiently therefore means to allow our weeping and wailing to become the purifying preparation by which we are made ready to receive the joy which is promised to us. (Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Out of Solitude*, 55-56)*

It's that time of year. Most of our homes could use a good spring cleaning. Likewise, our hearts and lives could use a good spiritual cleansing in this Lenten season. We begin by coming clean before our Lord, without excuse. It's our human nature to try to excuse ourselves and shift the blame to others. But God doesn't want any of our excuses or rationalizations. All he desires is "a broken and contrite heart" (Psalm 51:17).

Spring is also a good time to get rid of some of the clutter we have stored away in our basements and closets. Similarly, Lent is a good time to ask our Lord to remove some of the clutter and distractions from our lives which keep us too busy to spend much time with him in prayer and devotion, as well as in service to Christ's mission and our neighbors in need. And when we live each day in Christ and for Christ, we will have time to do the things that God wants us to do.

Forgiving God, create in me a clean heart, and put a new and right spirit within me, so I may receive the fullness of joy you have promised, and then share with others the joy of your salvation. Amen.

SATURDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY
GIVING UP OR GIVING

[Jesus said], “Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

John 13:34-35

Living a life of ministry is witnessing to him in the midst of this world. It is opening the eyes of our brothers and sisters in the human family to his presence among us, so that they too may enter this relationship of love.

*(Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Selfless Way of Christ*, 15-16)*

What are you giving up for Lent this year? Some common things are chocolate, sweets, cigarettes and alcohol. My children always tried to give up vegetables. The spiritual purpose of this custom is to help us focus more on the deprivation and suffering that our Lord endured for the sake of achieving our forgiveness and salvation, and then to help us focus on meeting the needs of those who are suffering from deprivation of body, mind or spirit.

During Lent, many people focus on losing weight or kicking a bad habit—something to help themselves. Instead of giving up something for Lent, which is often self-serving, why not begin a new habit of giving for forty days that would be a positive witness for Christ? Consider giving up forty minutes of screen time each day. Use that time to make a phone call or send an email or a personal note to a member of your family or church family, a neighbor or coworker—someone who is lonely, discouraged or in pain. And don't give up the good habit when Lent is past.

Loving Lord, you have loved me beyond measure. Help me to open the eyes of others to your loving presence among us. Amen.

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

WITH OR WITHOUT

All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that the person of God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

Without the Word, our life has little meaning, little vitality, and little energy. Without the Word, we remain little people with little concerns who live little lives and die little deaths. (Henri J. M. Nouwen, *With Burning Hearts*, 49)

Our focus this week is on the power of the Holy Spirit at work through God's Word and sacraments. How vital is God's Word for our life and ministry? The Bible isn't just the source of pithy proverbs, comforting psalms and the inspiring words of a great teacher. It is the source of everything God wants us to know about him and his eternal plans and purposes. It is also the source of everything we need to know in order to lead others out of the darkness of sin and unbelief, to live with us in God's marvelous and eternal light.

Without God's inspired Word, our life has little meaning or purpose or hope. But with God's Word as our inspiration, power source and guide, the Holy Spirit equips us to do the "good works, which God prepared ... so that we may walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10).

With God's Word at work in us, there is no limit to what our Lord can accomplish through us for his glory and for the good and growth of his kingdom.

Gracious God, equip and empower us through your holy Word and Holy Spirit to do the good works which you have prepared for us to do. Amen.

MONDAY, THE FIRST WEEK OF LENT

ORDINARY LIVES

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus ...

Colossians 3:16-17

*Our little stories are lifted up into God's great story and there given their unique place. The Word lifts us up and makes us see that our daily, ordinary lives are, in fact, sacred lives that play a necessary role in the fulfillment of God's promises. (Henri J. M. Nouwen, *With Burning Hearts*, 48)*

Sometimes our seemingly ordinary lives, and our place in God's plans, seem insignificant. We may think, "What can one person do that will really matter?" However, the Bible is full of accounts of people whose little stories became part of God's great story. All of us likely can think of someone, perhaps a teacher or Sunday school teacher, who never received an award or recognition but yet touched our life or influenced our faith in a profound way. If possible, thank them in person, or with a phone call or personal note.

You may not recognize the unique and important ways that you have been a blessing for the faith and life of others through the years. But God knows. And that's all that matters. As you continue to let the Word of Christ fill your heart and mind and life with the riches of his grace, the Holy Spirit will help you realize that your seemingly ordinary life is, in fact, a sacred life that is playing a necessary and important role in the fulfillment of God's plans and promises.

Lord Jesus, sometimes I feel so small and insignificant. By your grace and guidance, may my little story play a vital role in lifting up your great story of salvation. Amen.

TUESDAY, THE FIRST WEEK OF LENT

OUR CERTAIN HOPE

For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope.

Romans 15:4

When you pray with hope, you turn yourself toward God, trusting fully that God is faithful and makes all promises real. This hope gives you a new freedom which allows you to look realistically at life without feeling dejected.

(Henri J. M. Nouwen, *With Open Hands*, 71)

“I hope it won’t rain on our picnic this weekend.” “I hope they will start going to church again.” “I sure hope the treatments will be effective.” From the trivial to the spiritual to critical situations, we hope and pray for the best. But it’s never a sure thing, because the outcome depends on circumstances or people beyond our control.

However, when you pray with the kind of hope that trusts fully in God’s faithfulness and the trustworthiness of the scriptures (see Revelation 22:6), you have a sure and certain hope that is anchored in Christ and his Word and promises. This doesn’t mean that everything good that we hope for will happen. But our hope in Christ enables us to live with a new freedom in the midst of uncertain or discouraging circumstances.

Our past no longer drags us down, because Christ has set us free from our crippling guilt and regrets. So, we are able to focus on a hope-filled present, confident that our Lord will grant us the strength to overcome or endure whatever challenges we may face.

Faithful God, grant us a certain hope, which trusts fully in you and your sure Word and promises. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, THE FIRST WEEK OF LENT

ENTRAPPED

Our God is a God of salvation,
and to God, the Lord, belongs escape from death.

Psalm 68:20

*“Salvation” is about being saved. But from what do we need to be saved? The traditional answer—and the good one—is sin and death. We are entrapped by sin and death as in a hunter’s snare. (Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Can You Drink the Cup?*, 89)*

On June 23, 2018, a Thai soccer coach took his youthful team for a fun adventure to explore a deep cave. But monsoon rains trapped them deep in the cave. For over two weeks, the world waited anxiously for some word of hope. The entire team was found on July 2. But they were still entrapped for another week, until Thai Navy Seals brought them through the water-filled passages to safety.

All human beings are entrapped by sin and its deadly consequences because of our hopelessly flawed human nature. Without a rescuer, our situation is hopeless. But all who are blessed to live by faith in the crucified and risen Christ know that we have a Savior. Jesus rescued us from the cave of doom and despair by bringing us through the water of baptism, where our sins were washed away. And one day, he will lead us through the dark cave of death in the sure hope of a new and radiant life with him that lasts forever.

For weeks afterward, everyone talked about that remarkable cave rescue. How often do you talk about how Jesus has rescued you?

God of salvation, we praise you for rescuing us from the powers of sin and death through the atoning death and victorious resurrection of our Savior. Stir us to share this good news with others. Amen.

THURSDAY, THE FIRST WEEK OF LENT

THE BREATH OF LIFE

Jesus said to [his disciples] again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”

John 20:21-22

When we live from God’s breath we can recognize with joy that the same breath that keeps us alive is also the source of life for our brothers and sisters.
(Henri J. M. Nouwen, *With Open Hands*, 52)

“Is she breathing again?” the frantic family member cries out to the EMT doing CPR. We rejoice and give thanks to God when a loved one’s life and breath and health are restored. But sooner or later, there comes a time when each of us will breathe our last breath.

However, the breath of God in us never dies. When the Holy Spirit’s breath fills our heart and soul, through our baptism into Christ and our trusting faith in him, we are filled with the same breath that Jesus breathed on his disciples on Easter evening. The breath of God’s Spirit sustains our soul beyond the grave, while we wait for our body and soul to be reunited at the Second Coming of Christ.

Meanwhile, when we breathe out this life-giving good news to others around us, God’s Spirit joins his breath to ours to build up the gift of faith in others. What a joy and privilege it is to be used by God to help fill others with the breath of life that lives forever.

Holy Spirit, breathe on us anew through God’s power-filled Word. Send us forth with the faith and courage to share the only true and eternal source of life with our brothers and sisters who are gasping for the breath of life. Amen.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Henri Nouwen was one of the most innovative and influential spiritual writers of the past century. His vision of spirituality was broad and inclusive, and his compassion embraced all of humankind. Nouwen wrote 39 books on spirituality and the spiritual life that have sold millions of copies and been translated into over 20 languages. The passages quoted in this booklet are taken from certain of his published works, listed here, all of which are available through www.henrinouwen.org.

Behold the Beauty of the Lord by Henri J. M. Nouwen. Copyright © 1987 by Ave Maria Press®, Inc., P.O. Box 428, Notre Dame, IN 46556, www.avemariapress.com. Used with permission of the publisher.

Can You Drink the Cup? by Henri J. M. Nouwen. Copyright © 1996 by Ave Maria Press®, Inc., P.O. Box 428, Notre Dame, IN 46556, www.avemariapress.com. Used with permission of the publisher.

Community by Henri J. M. Nouwen. Copyright © 2021 by Orbis Books. All rights reserved. Reprinted by permission of Orbis Books.

Heart Speaks to Heart: Three Gospel Meditations on Jesus by Henri J. M. Nouwen. Copyright © 1989, 2007 by Ave Maria Press®, Inc., P.O. Box 428, Notre Dame, IN 46556, www.avemariapress.com. Used with permission of the publisher.

Out of Solitude by Henri J. M. Nouwen. Copyright © 2004 by Ave Maria Press®, Inc., P.O. Box 428, Notre Dame, IN 46556, www.avemariapress.com. Used with permission of the publisher.

Peacework by Henri J. M. Nouwen. Copyright © 2005 by Orbis Books. All rights reserved. Reprinted by permission of Orbis Books.

The Selfless Way of Christ by Henri J. M. Nouwen. Copyright © 2012 by Orbis Books. All rights reserved. Reprinted by permission of Orbis Books.

With Burning Hearts: A Meditation on the Eucharistic Life by Henri J. M. Nouwen. Copyright © 1994 by Orbis Books. All rights reserved. Reprinted by permission of Orbis Books.

With Open Hands by Henri J. M. Nouwen. Copyright © 1995 by Ave Maria Press®, Inc., P.O. Box 428, Notre Dame, IN 46556, www.avemariapress.com. Used with permission of the publisher.

Unless otherwise noted (or in excerpted text), Scripture quotations are from the *New Revised Standard Version of the Bible*, Updated Edition. Copyright © 2021 National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Reflections and prayers by Gil Duchow. Design by Jamie Wyatt. Cover image: Adobe Stock/nongkran_ch. © 2023 The Henri Nouwen Legacy Trust (www.henrinouwen.org) and Creative Communications for the Parish, a division of Bayard, Inc., 1564 Fencorp Dr., Fenton, MO 63026. www.creativecommunications.com. 800-325-9414. All rights reserved. Printed in the USA. JS4

