

READING AND DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR

Intimacy

by

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This general guide to *Intimacy* is designed to be used by individuals or small groups to help them reflect further on the many questions about our personal faith journeys and our relationships that Nouwen addresses in this book. Although the later chapters of the book in particular are focused on the very specific needs of seminarians and those training for campus ministry, the themes in these chapters are universally relevant, so questions that will be of interest to any reader have been included.

INTRODUCTION

1. Why do you think the university setting so lends itself to the questions Nouwen addresses in the book? During what phase of your life did you find yourself most

seeking to answer questions about how to live in intimacy with God and with others? Why?

FROM MAGIC TO FAITH

2. Nouwen describes Freud's theory about how, upon realizing the imperfections of our earthly fathers, many of us transfer to God the need for a perfect father figure who can do everything. To Freud, this transfer demonstrates the fallacy of religion, but another psychiatrist, Binswanger, counters that our feelings for our fathers instead stem from our instinctual realization of our relationship to God (p. 11). How has your own relationship with your father influenced your ideas about God?
3. Many of us can be intellectually mature but still cling to the religious equivalent of a tricycle. Nouwen states that our religion cannot be mature without three things: (1) recognizing God as the other, (2) viewing prayer as a dialogue, and (3) viewing religion as a source of creative autonomy (p. 12). How well does your faith incorporate these characteristics? Which is easiest for you? Which is hardest? Why?
4. Nouwen writes that, to be religiously mature, we must recognize and accept our own weaknesses and impurities. But when confronting these "black spots" (p. 14), we often have one of two extreme reactions: we either openly rebel, feeling that the church is overly prescriptive and oppressive, or we repress all of our dark side.

Do you tend toward one or the other? Why? Why does Nouwen feel that the latter is potentially more harmful?

5. How well do you feel you have integrated your light and dark sides? What did this process look like for you?
6. Nouwen describes religious growth as a journey from magic to faith. How would you characterize your own journey from magic to faith? What were the most significant milestones or bumps in the road? Do you feel that you have succeeded in forming a unifying philosophy of life, or are you still searching and questioning?

THE CHALLENGE TO LOVE

7. What are the key differences between the taking and the forgiving forms of existence? What does each have to do with revealing our weaknesses?
8. Love is being able to give yourself to someone else in total surrender. Sexuality and religion are both a total self-surrender in love. Why is this surrender such a risk? How does Jesus show us definitively that love is indeed a possibility?

STUDENT PRAYERS: BETWEEN CONFUSION AND HOPE

9. In analyzing a collection of student prayers, Nouwen found that students addressed many different faces of God. Which God do you find yourself addressing most often in your prayers now: the clarifying God, the

banned God, the big buddy God, the compassionate God, the beautiful God, the giving God, or the coming God? Which others are familiar to you from other phases of your life?

PENTECOSTALISM ON CAMPUS

10. Nouwen documents a trend toward Pentecostalism on campuses. What might a Pentecostal worship experience offer that others might not? When, if ever, have you found yourself attracted to a different experience of worship than the one with which you grew up? What were you looking for? What did you find? How were you able to reconcile your experiences?

DEPRESSION IN THE SEMINARY

11. Do you agree with Nouwen that verbal dialogue, small-group living, and fatigue can be causes of depression among college students? How have you seen this exemplified in your life or the lives of others?

THE PRIEST AND HIS MENTAL HEALTH

12. What does Nouwen mean by healthy timing, healthy spacing, and healthy self-understanding? Which is the biggest challenge for you personally?

TRAINING FOR THE CAMPUS MINISTRY

13. Nouwen describes how we all need to feel both a sense of competence in our chosen profession and a sense of the importance of our work. Do you feel competent in your work and believe that it is important? Why or why not? If you do not feel competent or believe that your work is important, how does this realization affect you?