



## EXCERPT



### ***Courage for Caregivers***

*Sustenance for the Journey in Company with Henri J. M. Nouwen*

August 16, 2022 | \$20, 176 pages, paperback | 978-1-5140-0556-9

Drawing on the writings and wisdom of Henri J. M. Nouwen's themes of caregiving, Marjorie J. Thompson offers a vulnerable exploration of caregiving intertwined with both her own many years of intimate caregiving of family members and collected stories of caregivers in varied settings and stages of life.

## Both the Giver and the Receiver Are Deeply Loved by God

Attending to stresses felt by those receiving our care reminds us of the central truth of *mutuality* in caregiving. We are vulnerable human beings on both sides of giving and receiving. No relationship is ever a one-way street, no matter how incapacitated the person receiving care may be, and reciprocity is real even if the relationship appears unevenly weighted. Mutuality becomes more meaningful as we recognize the *gifts* received while caring for others. Yes, care brings heartache and hardship, but it is also a sacred privilege. One of Henri's closest friends captures both aspects, describing these relationships as "tortuous and transforming"—a remarkably apt phrase.

As we open our hearts to the Spirit, we begin to see how much more we receive in giving than we may first recognize. The reason, spiritually speaking, is quite simple: Each of us is imprinted at our core with the divine image, however dim or distant it may seem. Deep in the heart of each person dwells an imperishable glory, freely given to us and cherished by our Creator beyond our wildest imagining! God loves us with an everlasting love not because we are "good" or even making progress toward goodness, but because we belong to a God who loves.

*The most important thing you can say about God's love is that God loves us not because of anything we've done to earn that love, but because God, in total freedom, has decided to love us.*

—Henri Nouwen

Henri never ceased to proclaim that we are all beloved children of God: "At the core of my faith belongs the conviction that we are the beloved sons and daughters of God. And one of the enormous spiritual tasks we have is to claim that and to live a life based on that knowledge." Our belovedness does not depend on our status or accomplishments or wholeness. In the upside-down economy of Grace, the least among us—the sick and forgotten, the weak and vulnerable, the disabled and frail—are often precisely the ones God works through most powerfully. Here is how Henri framed it: "Every person is an unrepeatable expression of God's creative grace. God can minister through anyone, and often does so in and through the least, the little ones, the handicapped, the poor, the unimpressive." Caregivers are called to recognize that the person receiving care is as dearly loved by God as we—even if that person is the crabbiest curmudgeon on the planet; even if that person lies on a bed in an unresponsive state day upon day; even if that person's behavior is difficult to understand or tolerate. These beloved ones of God are truly our teachers if we allow them to be—as many caregivers have discovered with time. Henri delighted to begin his talks with the theme of our belovedness. He would say, in essence, "Listen deeply to the voice of the great lover of souls. Hear that you are beloved. Then you can see that others are, too."

—Taken from chapter three, "The Gifts of Caregiving: Seeing and Celebrating"



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## **Mentored by Henri J. M. Nouwen**

“This book resonates with the lived experience of those of us who have spent a season giving or receiving care. It provides not only sustenance for the journey but also a seasoned spirituality that incorporates both the gifts and the guilt of the ministry of care. Rich in stories and practical suggestions, it is highly recommended for those who are blessed, challenged, and called to be a Simon of Cyrene for another.”

—Albert Haase, OFM, author of *Becoming an Ordinary Mystic: Spirituality for the Rest of Us*

**Marjorie J. Thompson** is an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church USA. She has served as a teacher, writer, and retreat leader for more than thirty years. Henri J. M. Nouwen was one of her early spiritual mentors and personal friend of her husband, John Mogabgab, who served as Henri’s teaching and research assistant for five years at Yale Divinity School.

Marjorie has served as adjunct faculty for several seminaries, including McCormick, Auburn, Wesley, and Vanderbilt Divinity School. She taught in The Upper Room’s Academy for Spiritual Formation and directed the foundational program for Stillpoint (Programs in Spiritual Direction and Contemplative Prayer) in Nashville. She has served as a chief architect of Companions in Christ. She is the author of *Family*, *The Forming Center*, and *Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life*. Her writings have also appeared in *Weavings*, *Worship*, *The Upper Room Disciplines*, and *The Abingdon Preaching Annual*. She is a widely sought retreat leader, teacher, and speaker in the area of Christian spirituality.



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