

Monday

Free to Love

A lot of giving and receiving has a violent quality, because the givers and receivers act more out of need than out of trust. What looks like generosity is actually manipulation, and what looks like love is really a cry for affection or support. When you know yourself as fully loved, you will be able to give according to the other's capacity to receive, and you will be able to receive according to the other's capacity to give. You will be grateful for what is given to you without clinging to it, and joyful for what you can give without bragging about it. You will be a free person, free to love.

—Henri Nouwen, *The Inner Voice of Love*

I want their hearts to be encouraged and united in love, so that they may have all the riches of assured understanding and have the knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

(Colossians 2.2-3)

Tuesday

Choose God's Love

You must believe in the yes that comes back when you ask, "Do you love me?" You must choose this yes even though you do not experience it.

You feel overwhelmed by distractions, fantasies, the disturbing desire to throw yourself into the world of pleasure. But you know already that you will not find there an answer to your deepest question. Nor does the answer lie in rehashing old events, or in guilt or shame. All of that makes you dissipate yourself and leave the rock on which your house is built.

You have to trust the place that is solid, the place where you can say yes to God's love even when you do not feel it...Keep saying, "God loves me, and God's love is enough." You have to choose the solid place over and over again and return to it after every failure.

—Henri Nouwen, *The Inner Voice of Love*

"Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell—and great was its fall!" Now when Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.

(Matthew 7.24-29)

Wednesday

Move Toward the Light

You are constantly facing choices. The question is whether you choose for God or for your own doubting self. You know what the right choice is, but your emotions, passions, and feelings keep suggesting you choose the self-rejecting way.

The root choice is to trust at all times that God is with you and will give you what you most need. . . . God says to you, "I love you. I am with you. I want to see you come closer to me and experience the joy and peace of my presence. I want to give you a new heart and a new spirit. I want you to speak with my mouth, see with my eyes, hear with my ears, touch with my hands. All that is mine is yours. Just trust me and let me be your God."

This is the voice to listen to. And that listening requires a real choice, not just once in a while but every moment of every day and night. It is you who decides what you think, say, and do. You can think yourself into a depression, you can talk yourself into low self-esteem, you can act in a self-rejecting way. But you always have a choice to think, speak, and act in the name of God and so move toward the Light, the Truth, and the Life.

—Henri Nouwen, *The Inner Voice of Love*

I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you....

(Deuteronomy 30.19-20)

Thursday

The Beloved

The unfathomable mystery of God is that God is a Lover who wants to be loved. The one who created us is waiting for our response to the love that gave us our being. God not only says: “You are my Beloved.” God also asks: “Do you love me?” and offers us countless chances to say “Yes.” That is the spiritual life: the chance to say “Yes” to our inner truth. The spiritual life, thus understood, radically changes everything. Being born and growing up, leaving home and finding a career, being praised and being rejected, walking and resting, praying and playing, becoming ill and being healed—yes living and dying—they all become expressions of that divine question: “Do you love me?” And at every point of the journey there is the choice to say “Yes” and the choice to say “No.”

—Henri Nouwen, *Life of the Beloved*

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. 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. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.

(1 John 4.7-12)

Friday

Be Free

The great spiritual task facing me is to so fully trust that I belong to God that I can be free in the world—free to speak even when my words are not received; free to act when my actions are criticized, ridiculed, or considered useless; free also to receive love from people and to be grateful for all the signs of God's presence in the world. I am convinced that I will truly be able to love the world when I fully believe that I am loved far beyond its boundaries.

—Henri Nouwen, *Beyond the Mirror*

'Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

(Matthew 5.11)

Saturday

Become like a Child

The great temptation is to use our obvious failures and disappointments in our lives to convince ourselves that we are really not worth being loved. Because what do we have to show for ourselves?

But for a person of faith the opposite is true. The many failures may open that place in us where we have nothing to brag about but everything to be loved for. It is becoming a child again, a child who is loved simply for being, simply for smiling, simply for reaching out.

This is the way to spiritual maturity: to receive love as a pure, free gift.

—Henri Nouwen, *Seeds of Hope*

And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;

for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,

to give knowledge of salvation to his people

by the forgiveness of their sins.

By the tender mercy of our God,

the dawn from on high will break upon us,

to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,

to guide our feet into the way of peace.'

(Luke 1.76-79)