



The Inner Voice of Love: A Journey Through Anguish to Freedom

By Henri J.M. Nouwen

Introduction

Opening Prayer:

Loving God,

In the midst of our struggles, you speak a quiet word of hope.

Help us to listen to your voice — the voice that calls us beloved.

In our brokenness and in our strength, may we hear the truth that sets us free.

We open our hearts to you in this time together.

Amen.

Heart-sharing prompt:

- Nouwen reminds us that God's voice — the inner voice of love — never stops calling to us. Even in our moments of doubt, shame, or unworthiness, that gentle voice continues to speak deep within us, inviting us to trust that we are beloved.
- I wouldn't ask anyone to share personal details just yet — that would be too forward — but I'd like to invite a simple gesture. By a show of hands, how many of you have ever felt something similar to what Henri Nouwen describes: a deep, interior struggle or sense of brokenness?
- Now, if you're comfortable, let's use our fingers to silently indicate the intensity of that experience for you:
 - **One finger** – some pain
 - **Two fingers** – very painful
 - **Three fingers** – horrible pain
 - **Four fingers** – excruciating pain
 - **Five fingers** – unbearable pain
- There's no need to explain — this is just a way to acknowledge what we've carried.
- We've all known pain in different degrees. But just as Nouwen discovered, God meets us right in the middle of that pain, never turning away — always whispering love.

Sharing prompts:

1. Can you recall a time when you became deeply aware of God's presence in your life? What was happening around you — or within you — that helped you recognize it?
2. Henri Nouwen writes about discovering a profound sense of love and belonging at L'Arche, a community that became a spiritual home for him. Where is — or where was — that place you've called "home" in a spiritual or emotional sense? What made it feel like home to you?
3. Some might describe Nouwen's experience as a time of deep desolation — a season of darkness. Yet even in that place, he continued to write, which became both his gift and his lifeline. Think of a time when you were in a period of desolation or spiritual struggle. Was there something you were still able to do — a gift you could still offer — even in the midst of the darkness? Did expressing that gift bring you any sense of hope or healing? Explain how that felt.
4. Nouwen writes: *"Intellectually, I knew that no human friendship could fulfill the deepest longing of my heart. I knew that only God could give me what I desired."* Have you ever had a moment of realizing that only God could fill the deepest longings of your soul? If so, when did that awareness come to you? Or are you still on that journey of discovering it?
5. Nouwen offered this book as a gift to others while he was still hurting — a courageous act of vulnerability and love. Have you ever given something — your time, presence, wisdom, or creativity — to someone else while you yourself were in pain? If so, what did you give? And what did that experience teach you?

Farwell and Closing Prayer:

- Invite everyone to share the one word or phrase they would like to take into the next week/month (depending how often you are meeting).
- Close with the Serenity Prayer ... *God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference.*