

**Making All Things New: An Invitation to the Spiritual Life, Henri Nouwen, copyright 1981  
HarperOne**

**Book Description**

What does it look like to live a life of spiritual discipline in our fast paced world? In *Making All Things New* Henri Nouwen offers thoughts on the pitfalls of busyness, worrying, and what it means to listen for the voice of God that promises to “make all things new.” The Formation Team has written questions for reflection to be a guide as you read. This is a short book of ninety-five pages.

**Study Questions written by Matt Krick**

**Chapter I—“All These Other Things”**

1. What would it look like for you to look critically at how you are living your life? What masks have you been wearing? Will you allow your honesty to lead you to hope and not despair? [22]
2. Nouwen speaks of the reality that we are often defined as busy people (23-25). Do you relate to his assessment? How or how not? Do you relate to the remark, “I know you are busy, but do you have a minute?” [24].
3. When in your life do you say, “What if?” Why do you think it is often so hard for us to live out the commands “Do not worry...” (Matthew 6:31) and “Do not be anxious for anything...” (Philippians 4:6)? These worries “prevent us from feeling a real inner freedom” [26]. Do you feel like your life is full of the freedom and abundant life that we are told about in Galatians 5:1 and John 10:10? Why or why not?
4. “...We have a deep sense of unfulfillment. While busy with and worried about many things, we seldom feel truly satisfied, at peace, or at home” [29]. Are you aware of a deep sense of unfulfillment in your life? What do you think is behind it?
5. The negative sentiments of “boredom, resentment, and depression” [29] would connect with what we call the anti-kingdom obstacles of personal and cultural despair, consumer autonomy, and loss of imagination. Discuss the effects of these sentiments and obstacles in your own life, the life of the church and in our culture.
6. “To be bored...does not mean that we have nothing to do, but that we question the value of the things we are so busy doing. The great paradox of our time is that many of us are busy and bored at the same time” (29-30). Take some time to reflect on the value of the things you spend your time doing. What do you truly value in life? Are your core values reflected in the way your time is spent?
7. “Boredom is often closely linked to resentment...” [30]. Do you sense this resentment in your own life? How have you or how are you feeling resentment in the home, in the workplace, in the church, or in other contexts? Have you noticed the effects of your resentment on other? What are they?

\*We are quick to deny resentment and blame others for the way we feel. Why do you think we are so quick to blame?

8. What areas in your life have you felt a sense of guilt? Has a feeling of depression set in? (31). Note: Depression is often misunderstood. It is not for all and overwhelming sadness, but for many (particularly men) it shows itself through anger. Depression could also be manifested through feelings of loneliness, despite community around you, buying sprees that leave you unfulfilled, etc...
9. “[Jesus] wants to bring us to the place where we belong...Only then can a desire for our true home develop” (37). This feeling of homelessness is prevalent in our culture. We feel uprooted, disconnected, and uncertain of who we are. What would it look like for you to release your fear, anxiety and worry to Christ and truly seek first the Kingdom? Might it feel like coming home?

## Chapter II—“His Kingdom First”

1. “Jesus wants us to move from the ‘many things’ to the ‘one necessary thing’” (42). What might this look like for you?
2. “Jesus’ only concern was to do the will of his Father” (46). Take a moment and prayerfully reflect on the things you have said, ‘yes’ to, or that you fill your day with. Are there any activities that may not be the Father’s will for you right now? Are there things the Father has called you to that you have not responded to yet?
3. “Jesus is the obedient one. The center of his life is this obedient relationship with the Father. This may be hard for us to understand, because the word *obedience* has so many negative connotations in our society...” (47). what negative connotations does the word “obedience” stir up for you? Were there things you were taught about God that evoked fear in you?

\*Many people have been raised to “obey” out of fear rather than love. In what ways does the Father’s relationship with Jesus and the loving obedience Jesus shows the Father help redeem the word “obedience” for you? (47-50). What would a loving obedient relationship to the loving Father through Jesus look like for you as you are led by the Spirit?
4. “Not only did Jesus come to free us from the bonds of sin and death, he also came to lead us into the intimacy of his divine life” (50-51). Often people make the work of Christ out to be about forgiveness and personal morality only. Jesus came not only to free us from something, but to free us to something. He frees us to enter into greater intimacy with him, to be more like him, and to bring his Kingdom in beautiful ways. What does this practically look like for you?
5. Discuss the John 17 passage (52). Try and put in words your understanding of this oneness with the Tri-une God. What does it look like for you to embrace the full reality and mystery of Christ in you?
6. Have you been able to embrace the idea of having a covenant marriage relationship with God? (54). God longs to have deeper intimacy with us. What does it look like for you to respond

and enter into deeper intimacy with the one who created you, redeemed you and lives in you by His Spirit?

7. "Life in the Spirit of Jesus is therefore a life in which Jesus' coming into the world—his incarnation, his death, and resurrection—is lived out by those who have entered into the same obedient relationship to the Father which marked Jesus' own life. Having become sons and daughters as Jesus was Son, our lives become a continuation of Jesus' mission" (55-56)  
\*Jesus declares his mission in Luke 4:18-19 as he reads Isaiah 61:1-2. What does it look like for you to continue the mission of Jesus both individually and with other believers? Who are the broken hearted among you? Who are the poor that you are in relationship with? Who are the oppressed and captives in your midst?
8. Reflect on these questions—"Is there a way to move from our worry-filled life to the life of the Spirit? Must we simply wait passively until the Spirit comes along and blows away our worries? Are there any ways by which we can prepare ourselves for the life of the Spirit and deepen that life once it has touched us?" (61).

### Chapter III—"Set Your Hearts"

1. What are the forces that pull you to worry, anxiety or fear? How do you sense God calling you to resist those forces and embrace the gift of the Kingdom of love that Jesus calls us to set our hearts on? (65-67).
2. Connect Elijah's experience (I Kings 19:9-13) to your own. What do you think of Nouwen's statement that "The core of all prayer is indeed listening, obediently standing in the presence of God" (68).
3. "Without solitude it is virtually impossible to live a spiritual life" (69). Discuss your thoughts about this statement.
4. "...It is thus not surprising that we have a difficult time being alone. The confrontation with our inner conflicts can be too painful for us to endure" (71). What Nouwen is hitting on here is key. We all too often avoid true solitude because we are afraid we will be confronted with the pain we carry, the sin patterns we live in and the lies we believe. What are you afraid will be revealed if you spend disciplined time in solitude with God? What "over distractions" do you use to keep you from allowing yourself to be confronted in the silence? What first steps do you sense God calling you to in order to change these patterns?
5. "It is clear that what matters is faithfulness to the discipline" (73). What does this look like for you in light of a "busy" life?
6. "...As we empty ourselves of our many worries, we come to know not only with our mind but also with our heart that we never were really alone, that God's Spirit was with us all along..." (74). In what ways are you becoming more aware of the presence of God's Spirit in you?
7. "The pains and struggles we encounter in our solitude thus become the way to hope, because our hope is not based on something that will happen after our sufferings are over,

but on the real presence of God's healing Spirit in the midst of these sufferings. The discipline of solitude allows us gradually to come in touch with this hopeful presence of God in our lives, and allows us also to taste even now the beginnings of the joy and peace which belong to the new heaven and the new earth" (75) In what ways are solitude and God's healing allowing you to begin tasting the joys of a restored creation now?

8. Do you have a "place" you go to be alone with God? If so, describe it. If not, do you think it would be helpful to have a specific place? Share with others what your experiences of solitude with God have been like recently.
9. Take time together as a group to read through a specific Scripture text and silently meditate on it. Carry this practice on into your individual solitude time as well.
10. "...the discipline of solitude enables us to live active lives in the world, while remaining always in the presence of the living God" (80). This is what it means to be a contemplative in action. Easier said than done, but practice being aware of the presence of Christ in you as you enter into the activities of your daily life.
11. How do you interact with those you are in community with? Would you describe your community as a place where new life can be received and brought to its fullness or is it more of just a social gathering? Do you find yourself more prone to internally criticize those you are in community with or are you more open to the life-giving Spirit of God in each member? Explain. (81-83).
12. "The mystery of community is precisely that it embraces *all* people, whatever their individual differences may be, and allows them to live together as brothers and sisters of Christ and sons and daughters of his heavenly Father" (83). Are you practicing the discipline of community in this way? How or how not?
13. What might communal silence and listening look like for you? (86-87). Take some time to practice silence and listening as a community on behalf of each other.