



The Selfless Way of Christ: Downward Mobility and the Spiritual Life

Henri J.M. Nouwen, Robert Ellsberg (Foreword)

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In this short work Henri Nouwen offers a penetrating reflection on the challenge of the spiritual life, especially the call to imitate Christ's example of "downward mobility." This vocation is sorely tested by the constant celebration of "upward mobility," which brings to mind the temptations Christ faced in the wilderness" to be "powerful, relevant, and spectacular." To prepare us for this path, Nouwen describes the "disciplines of spiritual formation," represented by the Church, the Word of God, and the promptings of our heart.

The Selfless Way of Christ: Downward Mobility and the Spiritual Life Details

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From Reader Review The Selfless Way of Christ: Downward Mobility and the Spiritual Life for online ebook

Kiel says

I don't think we can be reminded enough about the dangers of pride and the crave for power, and the need for a wholehearted devotion to Christ and his humble ways. Nouwen doesn't offer much here in the way of practical examples, which I found myself desiring as I read. What does downward mobility look like specifically to those believers in positions of influence, to the powerful, and what is the relationship between stewardship and the need to protect the soul from the damaging and sometimes damning temptations for control and power? Still, this read sets the reader on the helpful path of asking the right questions and thinking seriously about how well their life is demonstrating a pursuit of Christ or of mere personal gain.

Nikki Stahl says

Short but profound text which manages to confront the false self without shaming and present a way forward in the liturgical and sacramental streams of the Church.

Debi Walter says

"To truly become men and women whose identities are hidden in God, we need to have the courage to enter empty-handed into the place of solitude."

One of my favorite quotes from this outstanding, yet simple book. It's an easy read on a very challenging Truth. Love the art work of Van Gogh too.

Candice says

A beautiful little book that I wish I could fold up and store in my heart. Nouwen's insights about a life of "upward mobility" versus a life of "downward mobility" are special and should be frequently accessed as a reminder to us all who want to look like Jesus, follow Him, and love Him and our neighbors with our whole lives. This reading will certainly add depth to one's reflections on the song in Philippians 2 about imitating Christ's humility. When I began this book, my orientation was one of curiosity, willingness, and openness to Nouwen reshaping and reforming my thoughts about my own identity and concept of selfhood.

Additionally, the works of Vincent Van Gogh that were chosen and placed throughout the book are profound, and deserve time from the reader to gaze upon them and allow the image to be spoken to and impressed on the heart in terms of why Nouwen chose that specific work of art and how they add to the content of Nouwen's insights.

McKinley says

I found this a thoughtful book about how to shape one's life. (I read it right after reading *Behind the Beautiful Forevers* about life in a life in Mumbai slum.) It discusses vocation, temptation and formation as aspects of ministry and the spiritual life.

Instead of keeping up with the Jones, he instructs one in the way of downward mobility. And in living this way we will have a spiritual life in God. There are three lures of upward mobility, desire to be: relevant, spectacular and powerful; that what we do is meaningful, have others pay attention to us/what we do, and instead of power what powerlessness does. There are three disciplines for building the foundation to overcome these: the church which illuminates Christ's life, the book and close reading of the scriptures, the heart meaning the act of personal prayer. In the heart of God, we can come to understand human suffering and through Christ and his suffering, learn to alleviate the that suffering in others.

Dora says

Human Temptations:

To be Relevant: to make or do something that is needed and can be appreciated by people (49) the act of making productivity the basis of our ministry WE ARE NOT WHAT WE PRODUCE

To be Spectacular: to do something great, unusual or to attract many eyes (53) WE ARE UNCONDITIONALLY ACCEPTED

To be Powerful: having money, connections, fame, skills, and intellectual abilities WE CONNECT WITH OTHERS IN OUR VULNERABILITY AND WEAKNESS

To be Mastered by the Holy Spirit:

Discipline of the Church (71): a life lived with the experience and concrete manifestation of Christ- Advent, Christmas, Lent, Holy Week, Easter, and Pentecost

Discipline of the Book (76): scripture delivers God's word to our hearts, allowing those words to transform us, guiding, opening, removing fears, and dwelling in us.

Discipline of the Heart (82): personal prayer, time alone with God to face our tensions, animosities, frustrations, resentments

Longfellow says

Picked this one up at exactly the right time in my life. Read over half of it before getting over my silly aversion to marking up a nice hardback copy. But after finishing, I went back and reread the first half, being sure to leave plenty of blue ink behind.

I think Henri's approach in this book demonstrates how very metaphysical Christ's message is. Here is a quote from the opening chapter, a thesis statement I think, which the remainder of the book explains in surprisingly sensible detail:

"It is not enough to try to imitate Christ as much as possible; it is not enough to remind others of Jesus; it is

not even enough to be inspired by the words and actions of Jesus Christ. No, the spiritual life presents us with a far more radical demand: to be living Christs here and now, in time and history."

Jaimie says

2016 Reading Challenge - a book you've already read at least once

This book has a special place in my heart. I first read it in 2011 and at the time, the idea of downward mobility was mind-blowing to me. And something I had never heard before. I grew up in a mega-church that preached and valued upward mobility as a hallmark of spiritual growth, so this book was a turning point in my life of seeing the gospel in a new way. Not a gospel heavily influenced by Western values and American culture, but of Jesus Christ and the path he lived and preached. Now that I've had the chance to reflect on the idea of downward mobility for several years, I gained even more from this book upon second reading. It's a short little book for having such a powerful message, only 96 pages, so I would definitely recommend this as a must read for every Christian. I have included some direct quotes below:

"We can only call ourselves witnesses of Jesus when we have heard him with our own ears, seen him with our own eyes, and touched him with our own hands."

"Power always lusts after greater power precisely because it is an illusion. Despite our experience that power does not give us the sense of security we desire, but instead reveals our own weaknesses and limitations, we continue to make ourselves believe that more power will eventually fulfill our needs."

"But the mystery of our ministry is that we are called to serve not with our power but with our powerlessness. It is through powerlessness that we can enter into solidarity with our fellow human beings, form a community with the weak, and thus reveal the healing, guiding, and sustaining mercy of God."

"...we forget that service outside of God becomes self-seeking, and self-seeking service leads to manipulation, and manipulation to power games, and power games to violence, and violence to destruction-even when it falls under the name of ministry."

"The discipline of the Christian disciple is not to master anything, but rather to be mastered by the Spirit. True Christian discipline is the human effort to create the space in which the Spirit of Christ can transform us into his lineage."

Carlos Abrille says

I highly recommend this book as a must read. It's book all your professors in college would ask you to avoid. Because in college all the professors want your mind focused on competition and succeeding. Naturally this book is quite the opposite but ironically is where all your professors got it wrong. It's the book you should have read In college before graduation. So you're more prepared to face your future and what it all means for those who are of Christian faith.

Sister says

Short but powerful. Henri Nouwen has been one of my favorite spiritual reading authors for a long time. This one gets right to the point: answering the call to holiness means the Cross and downward mobility. The temptations to be relevant, spectacular and powerful lead us in the opposite direction. In order to fight these temptations, we must follow the discipline of the Church, the discipline of the Book and the discipline of the heart.

W. Littlejohn says

Forgot to add this book. Read it a few months ago at my wife's recommendation. An invaluable read for any aspiring academics (though really for anyone at all). Nouwen was a highly-renowned professor of theology at Harvard and Yale before giving up his post in the early '80s and going to live and work in a community dedicated to one-on-one care for the mentally handicapped.

In this book, he challenges the pervasive mindset of "upward mobility" that infects our culture, and calls on Christians to avoid the career mentality that is always seeking advancement and a bigger platform and position of influence, even for very good and noble ends. Instead, Christ calls us to downward mobility, to serve him and change the world by taking up the lowest station, not the highest.

A short and deeply challenging read

Austin Scott says

I'll read anything by Nouwen. This book is a quick read, but insightful and passionate.

James Klagge says

A short, profound book. I have probably read more books by him than anyone else in the last 8 years--though they are all short. But they are dense and demand care and attention. As an academic it is easy to think one is escaping (all) the temptations of upwardly-mobile modern society, yet he shows how they pop up again in other ways. We certainly have our own forms of achievement. I aspire to downward mobility, and yet see that success at that aspiration is yet another trap. All I can say right now is that I am trying to rethink/re-feel. 8/23 update: I just got back from a few days with my parents. My father can no longer stand up. He has suffered from Parkinson's for a dozen years. A year ago he had a fall that has left him unable to walk. A month ago he had an infection that has left him unable to stand. He can hardly articulate a complete sentence (though I think he sometimes has complete thoughts in mind). Should we simply hope for his death? Should we vigorously work with him to regain abilities--at least to be able to stand? Should we find a way to accept his downward trajectory as a spiritual gift? The first two options are upward-oriented: Give up on him b/c he is no longer upwardly mobile, or Keep trying to make him upwardly mobile. This book opens up the latter downward option.

Scott Schlotfeld says

I give this five stars because it is life changing. Originally written within the context of the yuppie eighties, Nouwen calls out what I believe are the greatest temptations for American Christians and even more so in the 21st century...the temptation to be spectacular, the temptation to be relevant and the temptation to be powerful; paralleling the three with Jesus' temptations in the desert. He then goes on to give his three practices to resist these temptations and instead live a life of downward mobility. My only criticism would be that he would have included the practice of service as well. Very short read and well worth reading again and again.

Grace Humbles says

This book will knock you on your ass.
