

The Wounded Healer

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Discussion Guide

The Wounded Healer, by Henri Nouwen (Doubleday Image Books, copyright © 1972), is a guide to ministry in contemporary society and shows how ministers can make their own wounds available as a source of healing for others. The four chapters focus on aspects of suffering and challenges readers to enter Christian ministry. The book offers a vision for ministry in today's troubled world.

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Chapter 1

Ministry in a Dislocated World

This chapter examines the effect that technology, specifically nuclear weapon capability, has had on society.

1. In what ways are boundaries that give structure to life becoming increasingly vague?
2. In your own words, give a summary of the predicament of “nuclear man.”
3. What are the beliefs and fears of “nuclear man”? How does this differ from “pre-nuclear man”
4. This book was written in the ‘70s, and the shadow of nuclear war is the main technological threat to which Nouwen refers. Name some of the fears of contemporary society. Are they the same or different?
5. How are your thoughts and feelings the same as Peter’s? How are they different?
6. Explain the meaning of “historical dislocation.”
7. Do you believe the language of traditional Christianity has lost its liberating power? Explain your belief.
8. Discuss why “nuclear man” does not live with an ideology.

9. Do you have the same beliefs and feelings as “nuclear man”? Explain your position.
10. How do we look for experiences that give us a sense of value?
11. Why is “nuclear man” often unable to relate to the Christian message?
12. How and why is Peter searching for new ways of being immortal?
13. “Nuclear man” tries to free himself from his predicament in two main ways: the mystical and the revolutionary. Compare and contrast these ways.
14. Explain the meaning of the Christian way.
15. How has this discussion helped you?

Chapter 2

Ministry For a Rootless Generation

This chapter examines the condition of a suffering generation.

1. What is your impression of young people today? List some strengths and weaknesses.
2. What is meant by “inward generation”? Does this seem to characterize the youth of today? Why or why not?
3. Why are some young people drawn inward?
4. Discuss some positive aspects of inward thinking. What are some of the negative aspects?
5. Explain what “a generation without fathers” means. Does this seem equally true of young people today?
6. List and discuss some reasons that parents or authority figures are rejected.
7. Explain the meaning of “the convulsive generation.”
8. Why do youth often lack vision?
9. In what ways do youth think that adults have failed?
10. How is convulsive behavior often misunderstood?
11. Discuss the first and most basic task of the minister of tomorrow according to Nouwen. Do you agree or disagree with his assessment? Does this seem relevant for today’s world?
12. What is meant by “articulation” and why is it important? How is it a form of leadership?

13. How do you define compassion? Discuss the role compassion should play in ministering to youth.
 14. Why should the Christian leader of the future be a contemplative critic?
 15. What new insight about ministry did you learn from reading this chapter?
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Chapter 3

Ministry to a Hopeless Man

This chapter examines the condition of a suffering minister.

1. Share a time when you experienced an important conversation. Why do you remember it? How did it affect you?
2. Give your first impression after reading the conversation between John and Mr. Harrison.
3. How did John feel after his visit with Mr. Harrison? Was this feeling justified?
4. Share your experience as a hospital patient or as a visitor. What feelings occurred?
5. In what ways can you relate to John?
6. In what ways can you relate to Mr. Harrison?
7. What were Mr. Harrison's thoughts about death?
8. What did John fail to hear? What did Mr. Harrison fail to communicate?
9. How was Mr. Harrison afraid to live and afraid to die?
10. In what ways are people just like Mr. Harrison prisoners of their own existence?
11. Do you think anyone can change a person's ideas and feelings a few hours before death? Why?
12. How might John have better offered help and hope?
13. How could John have saved Mr. Harrison's life by "becoming his tomorrow"?
14. List and discuss the three principles of Christian leadership that can be derived from John's visit with Mr. Harrison.
15. How has this discussion helped you?

Chapter 4

Ministry By a Lonely Minister

This chapter looks at the suffering minister, the wounded healer.

1. What is the purpose of ministry today?
2. List some of the wounds people have in today's world.
3. How do you define loneliness?
4. Share a time when you were lonely. How did it feel?
5. Discuss why loneliness is the most painful of human wounds.
6. How is loneliness often hidden?
7. Why is a minister's loneliness especially difficult?
8. Discuss how wounds can become a source of healing.
9. List some words that facilitate the process of healing.
10. In your own words, explain the meaning of hospitality and how it is an important ministry.
11. Why is concentration such an important aspect of ministry?
12. Discuss how hospitality becomes community.
13. What does Christian community mean to you and what does it include?
14. What new insight about ministers and ministry did you learn from this chapter?
15. How are we all ministers? What are ways that each of us can minister to one another?