

Christian Education
Week 6: February 21, 2024

Life of the Beloved
Chapter 1: Being the Beloved

1. Why might “you are my beloved” be the most intimate truth about all human beings?
2. How might we contribute to the words “you are the beloved” reverberate into every corner of the people we love?
3. Why can we only extend the gift of belovedness to another to the extent that we claim it for ourselves?
4. Why is it that we can hear the negative and destructive voices of the world more clearly than the voice of the one who calls us beloved?
5. Why is self-rejection the real temptation of our life?
6. How are arrogance and self-rejection related?
7. In what ways do self-rejection and arrogance impact ourselves?
8. Why do we run around looking for other voices or things to convince us of our belovedness when we have the voice telling us?
9. What causes us to disregard the voices of loved ones who express our belovedness?
10. Why does chasing spiritual fulfillment from sources of the world lead to spiritual death?
11. How is it that attentiveness to the words of the voice lead to life rather than death?
12. What is the dry sand that Nouwen speaks of?
13. Why do we need guides for the spiritual life?

Christian Education
Week 7: February 28, 2024

Life of the Beloved
Chapter 2: Becoming the Beloved

1. How is it that being the beloved is both the origin (beginning) and the fulfillment (end) of the life of the Spirit?
2. Why is becoming the beloved the great spiritual journey we have to make?
3. What does he mean when he says that all human beings have deep inner memories of the paradise/innocence that we have lost?
4. Why does becoming the beloved entail a long and painful process of appropriation or incarnation?
5. Why must the truth of my belovedness be pulled down from above me into the ordinariness of my everyday life?
6. Why should the truth of our belovedness become visible in our daily acts?
7. Can we become as articulate about our spiritual journey as we are with our psychological? How?
8. Why are the words “taken,” “blessed,” “broken,” and “given” good words to describe this process of becoming the beloved?

Christian Education
Week 8: March 6, 2024

Life of the Beloved
Chapter 3: Taken

1. Why is it that we can only desire to become the beloved when we know that we are the beloved?
2. What are your own feelings towards the idea of being taken/chosen by God? Why do you think you feel that particular way?
3. Why are people who are chosen as likely to be persecuted as admired?
4. How is it that being seen by God makes us precious?
5. Why is being chosen in God's heart from all eternity so significant for our sense of belovedness?
6. Are you able to conceive of a love that chooses so as to not create competition? Why or why not?
7. How is it that being chosen by God creates inclusiveness rather than exclusiveness?
8. What might happen if we submit the word "chosen" to the world?
9. How does the narratives about ourselves that we inherit impact the way we live in the world?
10. How does the narrative of the gospel reframe our own narratives, past and present?
11. By engaging in the task of unmasking the world are we against the world? Why or why not?
12. Why is community essential to reclaiming our chosenness?
13. Why is celebration and gratitude important disciplines to engage in for knowing ourselves to be chosen?
14. In what way are these three guidelines for claiming our chosenness spiritual disciplines? How do you envision yourself practicing them moving forward?
15. Why is it that recognizing our own preciousness to God in an ongoing and increasing way leads to seeing preciousness in others and helping them to claim it for themselves?
16. Have you experienced this sort of relationship that began in competition to some degree but has settled into trust and gifting to the other?

Christian Education
Week 9: March 13, 2024

Life of the Beloved
Chapter 4: Blessed

1. Have you or do you encounter the language of “blessed” and “cursed” in your life? If so, how are they used?
2. In our own life together (in contrast to the synagogue) what are the moments and rites of blessing?
3. Why do we need blessing?
4. In what significant ways might “affirmation” and “blessing” differ?
5. Why was the sign of the cross upon the forehead insufficient to be a “real” blessing?
6. What might happen if our community took time to bless each other in ways that Nouwen describes about the prayer meeting in his community?
7. How is blessing a true sign of the beloved and how does it sustain us through the trials of our lives?
8. Do you experience a greater sense of being cursed rather than blessed? If so, why?
9. Why is your blessedness the truth and your cursedness a lie?
10. How do prayer and presence lead us to know our blessedness?
11. Why would memorizing and using words of Scripture or prayer in our silence and solitude help us to hear our blessedness?
12. What does Nouwen mean when he says to cultivate presence?
13. What is the threat to the discipline of presence and why is it a threat?
14. Why is it that those who are blessed can bless others?

Life of the Beloved
Chapter 5: Broken

1. How would you define brokenness? (Generally, not your particular brokenness)
2. Take some time to name your particular brokenness; I recommend prayerfully sitting with God in prayer asking him to reveal those areas to you, write them down, and be ready to pray over them. In our time together, if we feel safe enough, we'll have an opportunity to share our discoveries.
3. Why do you think people are comfortable to share their brokenness?
4. What do you think and feel about the idea that our unique forms of brokenness reveal something about our individuality?
5. Why would the recognition that we are alone in our pain be of greater comfort than hearing that others also suffer?
6. How does the call for us, as God's beloved, to claim our brokenness make you feel?
7. How does the suffering of the heart differ from more social/physical forms suffering?
8. Why is our brokenness most obviously connected to our sexuality?
9. What impact do our urban/suburban landscapes make on our brokenness?
10. In what way does the AIDS crisis tell us about our brokenness?
11. Why is befriending our brokenness unnatural for us?
12. Why is this making a friend of our former enemy (brokenness) a necessary step for the beloved?
13. If putting our brokenness under the blessing is a precondition for befriending our brokenness then why do you think Nouwen addresses it second?
14. What does he mean that we live under the curse? How does our brokenness relate to that?
15. How might we go about the renewal of our minds to view our brokenness under the blessing rather than the curse?
16. What is the essential difference in mindset between brokenness as curse and brokenness as blessing?
17. How does Nouwen's closing illustration of the de-robed priest and the shattered glass speak to you about brokenness?
18. Go back to #2; if you're able begin to attempt to pray to bring those brokennesses under the blessing.

Christian Education
Week 11: March 27, 2024

Life of the Beloved
Chapter 6: Given

1. Why do you think it is that only as we are people who are given that we can fully understand our being chosen, blessed, and broken?
2. Would you agree that our greatest fulfillment lies in giving ourselves to others? Why or why not?
3. How has someone giving themselves to you changed who you are?
4. In what way does the context of our world impact our ability to give?
5. How is it that our brokenness enables our ability to give?
6. What does he mean when he says “be food for one another”?
7. How does his “intimate” language impact you? Why do you think that is?
8. Why is the real/right question “Who can we be for each other?”
9. Have you experienced the difference between someone who gives you something and someone who gives themselves?
10. What are your thoughts on the difference between talents and gifts?
11. How do you feel about the possibility of your death being your final gift of self?
12. How does our culture inhibit us from preparing well for death?
13. How does our death enhance our gift of love to the community?
14. Have you ever experienced the difference between someone dying well and someone dying a bitter death? What did that feel like?
15. How is it that we are responsible for the way we die?
16. Is the idea that “he died, yet never died,” biblical?
17. What does Nouwen mean when he says we are bread for the world?

Christian Education
Week 12: April 3, 2024

Life of the Beloved
Chapter 7: Living As the Beloved

1. What do you think Nouwen means when he say “As those who are chosen . . . we are *called* to live our lives . . .”?
2. What has been your own perspective to the relationship between “secular” ambitions and interests and the “sacred” or spiritual life? Why do you think that was?
3. What are your thoughts about Nouwen’s analogy of Jacob in Egypt?
4. Why must we know ourselves as the beloved prior to enjoying the good things the world has to offer?
5. Why ought we to look at ourselves as having been sent into the world by the one who loves us from before the world began?
6. In what way does knowing our sent-ness fulfil our vocation as image of God?
7. Why is life a God-given opportunity to become who we are, etc.?
8. Nouwen suggests God asks the question of his creation “do you love me?” How does that question shape our understanding of God?
9. Nouwen claims that as the beloved things that appear to be antithesis are in fact more similar than different—how so?
10. What did you think of “the demon divides; the Spirit unites”?
11. Nouwen says that where the Spirit works, divisions vanish—what do you think he means by this?
12. What is Nouwen’s vision of the relationship between this “chronological” life and eternity?
13. How might we manage our belief about death?