

**The Return of the Prodigal Son – Possible Journaling and/or Discussion Questions
from henrinouwen.org**

1. Rembrandt's painting had a profound and lasting effect on Henri. What work of art – painting, novel, poem, musical composition – has touched you deeply? Why?
2. Nouwen suggests that "accepting love, forgiveness and healing is often much harder than giving" love and forgiveness (page 12 hc/13 sc). Why do you think this is true for Henri? If this is true for you also, what keeps you from accepting love, forgiveness and healing?
3. According to Henri, leaving home "is a denial of the spiritual reality that I belong to God with every part of my being" (page 35hc/37sc). When has Henri left home? When have you left home?
4. What is your reaction to Henri's identification of Jesus with the prodigal son? How does Henri justify it? How does this change your understanding of Jesus?
5. Why are trust and gratitude such essential disciplines for Henri? Why must we make a conscious effort to practice these disciplines?
6. Henri states: "Resentment and complaints, deep as they may seem, can vanish in the face of him in whom the full light of Sonship is visible" (page 82 hc/87-88sc). In what ways is Jesus the elder son? In this role what does Jesus reveal to us about the nature of God?
7. According to Henri, God's "only desire is to bless" (p. 90 hc/96 sc). How does Rembrandt convey this sense of blessing in his painting? When in your life have you felt especially blessed?
8. Henri asks: "Wouldn't it be wonderful to make God smile by giving God the chance to find me and love me lavishly? (page 101 hc/107sc). What are you doing to open yourself to God's love? Why is this often difficult? When have you felt unworthy of God's love?
9. According to Henri: "Celebration belongs to God's Kingdom. God not only offers forgiveness, reconciliation, and healing, but wants to lift up these gifts as a source of joy for all who witness them" (page 106 hc/113 sc). How does this statement affect how you see God? When in your life have you felt great joy? What can you do to find joy in the little things of everyday life?
10. Given all the darkness in our world there is much temptation to be cynical. When are you inclined toward cynicism? How do you respond to people who are perpetually cynical?
11. In what ways do you "remain subject to . . . competitive ways" of the world and "expect to be rewarded for all the good" you did? (page 117 hc/125 sc) How can you move beyond this to become the father or mother Henri says we are called to be?
12. Henri names "three ways to a truly compassionate fatherhood: grief, forgiveness, and generosity" (page 120 hc/128 sc). What does he mean by each of these disciplines? Why are they so difficult?