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Book Review - *In The Name of Jesus* by Henri Nouwen

In The Name of Jesus is potent medicine for the Minister's soul. Nouwen brilliantly contrasted the devil's three temptations of Christ with Christ's thrice questioning of Peter at his restoration. He weaves the accounts in such a way that the Christian leader realizes he has been listening to the lies and temptations of the devil, even in the name of ministry, while ignoring Christ's simple question: Do you love Me?

The one who loves Jesus is the one who can feed His lambs. The one who trusts that Jesus loves him may tend his sheep. But there are so many clouded and misguided motives stirring within a Christian leader's heart. The evidence is in the unspoken goals and expectations driving the leader in his ministry. I call the book medicine because, like a specialist doctor, he chronicles symptoms, diagnoses root causes, and finally offers actionable solutions.

Could it be that ministers have been comparing themselves to all of the wrong standards of success and accomplishment? If their standards of success are skewed then they will seek the wrong examples to follow. Of course, this actually leads to spiritual dryness and ruin and the leader may never understand why. "I woke up one day with the realization that I was living in a very dark place and that the term 'burnout' was a convenient psychological translation for a spiritual death" (Nouwen, 20).

In recent years, many Ministers admit to struggling with "burnout" to a greater or lesser degree. Nouwen's words resonated with me. Ministers "perceive themselves as having very little impact. They are very busy, but they do not see much change. It seems their efforts are

fruitless...One of the most painful realizations for many Christian leaders is that fewer and fewer young people feel attracted to follow in their footsteps” (Nouwen, 32). It is true.

But all of those things, in one way or another, put the focus of ministry upon the minister and not upon the Lord he serves or the people he serves. The perspective of accepting irrelevance, though it pains my pride, was a freeing and healthy corrective for me. Too often, I am the failed tightrope walker who did not have the power to draw thousands of people, could not make many conversions, not as popular with the youth, and not able to respond to the needs of people like I expected I could (Nouwen, 55).

I was deeply challenged by the portrait of spiritual maturity. “Jesus has a different vision of maturity: It is the ability and willingness to be led where you would rather not go... the servant-leader is the leader who is being led to unknown, undesirable, and painful places. The way of the Christian leader is not the way of upward mobility... but the way of downward mobility ending on the cross” (Nouwen, 81-82). This is radically contrary to many ministry books today with tactics for building up and leading a big, upper middle-class megachurch in the suburbs.

In the Name of Jesus has brought several things up for me that I need to sort out. But I think his prescription of prayer to raise my confidence in God’s love, community to invite and share ministry with others, and theological reflection to discern the direction for my life and ministry can bring the healing I need. It is good medicine. I am so thankful for this little book!