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Mutual Ministry: A Reflection on Henri Nouwen's In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership

By Intern Miranda Joebgen

As Nouwen reflects on what he has learned throughout his life as a Christian leader, he names three temptations that face leaders of today: the temptation to be relevant, spectacular, and powerful. Now, these temptations initially don't sound all that bad - after all, how effective can a leader be if they are irrelevant, underwhelming, and weak? But these temptations can easily become all-consuming. In pursuit of relevance, we can become distracted by our own abilities and accomplishments rather than remaining rooted in the heart of God and the love we bear - a love that remains unchanged regardless of anything we have achieved on our own. As we strive for perfection, society tells us that in order to be successful, we have to be perfectly flawless without showing vulnerability or leaning on others. We forget that Jesus sent his disciples out to proclaim the gospel not alone, but with the support of others in their community. And as we try to effect change in this world, clinging to power seems so much easier than releasing control and truly loving and abiding with God's people - no matter where that love may lead.

All three of these temptations struck a chord with me, but as I am beginning a new chapter in my journey of ministry, the temptation to be spectacular and impressive is at the forefront of my mind. While I know my internship is meant to be a year of learning and growth, there is still a voice in my mind that tells me I have to be perfect from the start, and I have to do it on my own. I have to say yes to everything, get it all done perfectly, and not seek help from anyone - or else, I will be perceived as a flawed, weak leader. Nouwen reminded me that this is a dangerous narrative to believe - and it is certainly not what God has in mind. Jesus has called us into ministry together, and in order to embody this calling, we must be vulnerable, honest, and loving with one another. I am called to ministry and I am called to serve - but I am not called to be perfect or do everything on my own. Jesus did not call perfect people to proclaim the gospel. He did not seek out the 'self-made person.' Jesus sought out deeply flawed people, and called them into mutual ministry with one another.

Throughout this year, I pray that God will give me the courage to be honest about my ministry journey - to share my struggles and challenges as well as my joys and triumphs. Most importantly, I pray that God will continually call me out of myself and into this community as we practice mutual ministry together as the body of Christ.

In Peace,
Intern Miranda

