

The Return of the Prodigal Son  
Henri Nouwen  
April 6, 2025 Chapters 7, 8 and 9

Questions for Chapter 7

1. Even though we call the parable *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, Nouwen says, “*The emphasis is less on the son than on the father.*” (p. 93). Agree or Disagree?.
2. What do you see in the father?
3. Nouwen wrote, (The father) “*offers the freedom to reject that love or to love in return. It is precisely the immensity of the divine love that is the source of the divine suffering.*” (p. 95). How do you see that in the parable and the painting?
4. In Rembrandt’s painting how do you see the “*authority of compassion?*”

Questions for Chapter 8

1. What do you see/feel in the father’s hands?
2. Nouwen wrote, “*The Father is not simply a great patriarch. He is mother as well father. He touches the son with a masculine hand and a feminine hand. He holds, and she caresses. He confirms and she consoles.*” (p. 99). Do you see the Father as a mother also?
3. How do you understand “*the freedom*” that the father gives both of his sons?  
  
*“The mystery, indeed, is that God in her infinite compassion has linked herself for eternity with the life of her children. She has freely chosen to become dependent on her creatures, who she has gifted with freedom. This choice causes her grief when they leave; this choice brings her gladness when they return.”* (p. 102)
4. Do you consider that God is a God who compares people?

5. Do you see the great conversion as moving from this world to belonging to God?
6. How do you see grief as a way of becoming the compassionate Father? Forgiveness? Generosity?

### Questions for Chapter 9

1. When you look at the Father in Rembrandt's painting, what do you see/ feel?
2. Nouwen says, "*Not only does the father forgive without asking questions and joyfully welcomes his lost son home, but he cannot wait to give him new life, life in abundance.*" (p. 111). What does that say about God our Father? How does the youngest son feel about himself?
3. Do you picture our God throwing a big party? Yet how does Jesus often speak of his Father in the parables? "*Celebration belongs to God's kingdom.*" (p. 113)
4. The older son and the others in Rembrandt's painting stand to the side. Do we, do the same? Are we willing to celebrate with our heavenly Father when the Prodigal Son returns home? Why does God rejoice? (p. 114)
5. How do you find joy in the midst of the world/ nation in which we live right now?