Today's Scripture reminded me one of my favorite spiritual writers, Henri Nouwen. He was a man with a mighty thirst for God, who sought God, and called upon Him.

Henri was born in 1932 in Holland. His father was a law professor, and his mother was a very cultured woman, interested in literature and foreign languages. Henri had two younger brothers and a younger sister.

From early childhood, Henri wanted to become a priest. He was ordained in 1957, and then he studied psychology at the Catholic University in Holland for seven years.

Henri came to America in 1964 and taught psychology at Notre Dame University and Pastoral Theology at Harvard and Yale Divinity Schools for several years.

He was a popular and highly respected professor at some of the world's most prestigious universities.

Then Henri volunteered to serve for nine months as the chaplain at a community for severely mentally and physically handicapped adults in France. At the end of nine months, he decided to devote the rest of his life to serving as a chaplain to the severely handicapped.

He gave up the security and comfort and prestige of being an acclaimed Ivy League professor and spent the rest of his life as the chaplain at a home for severely handicapped adults in Canada.

Henri has been called "the wounded healer." His books are his attempt to understand and survive his own pain and to help others deal with theirs through faith and a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

In his book, Life of the Beloved, Henri wrote, "Our brokenness is so visible and tangible, so concrete and specific, that it is often difficult to believe that there is much to think, speak, or write about other than our brokenness."

For seven months in 1987 and '88, Henri was hospitalized and treated for anxiety and depression.
In the introduction to the journal he wrote during his confinement, he wrote: "It was a time of extreme anguish, during which I wondered whether I would be able to hold on to my life. Everything came crashing down—my self-esteem, my energy to live and work, my sense of being loved, my hope for healing, my trust in God—everything.

All that had given my life meaning was pulled away and I could see nothing in front of me but a bottomless abyss."

Everyone around Henri around was assuring him they loved him, cared for him, appreciated him, and admired him, yet he experienced himself as a “useless, unloved, and despicable person.”

Ever feel that way?
Me too.

He saw the bottomless depths of human misery and felt that there was nothing worth living for.

Ever feel that way?
Me too.

Hundreds of thousands of grateful readers were praising Henri for his spiritual insights, but he felt empty of faith. People were thanking him for bringing them closer to God, but he felt that God had abandoned him.

The suffering he identifies as the most common and most painful in our culture is that of “feeling rejected, ignored, despised and alone.”

Ever feel that way? Me too.

During his confinement and treatment for his mental, emotional, and spiritual collapse, Henri came to understand pain as the “experience of not receiving what you most need.”

For him, pain was an empty place where he felt sharply the absence of the love he most desired. In that place, he was confronted with not only his wounds but also with his powerlessness to heal himself.
After a long spiritual struggle, Henri began to trust that his experience of emptiness was not the final experience, that beyond it was a place “where we are being held in love.”

The solution Henri sought and eventually found was to enter into the presence of Jesus just as he was and to ask Jesus to give him “a new heart, a new spirit, a new mind, and a new body.”

Fortunately, Henri recovered sufficiently from this breakdown of 1987-1988 to return to his chaplaincy with the physically and mentally handicapped adults he loved and served for the rest of his life.

Henri had learned the lesson that “peace is not primarily about doing. It is first of all,” he acknowledged, “the art of being.”

Henri had rediscovered that, for him, being and the heart were even more important than doing and the mind.

“What makes us human,” he asserted, “is not primarily our minds but our hearts; it is not first of all our ability to think which gives us our particular identity in all of creation, but it is our ability to love.”

By heart Henri did not mean the place of human emotions as opposed to the mind as the place of human thought. Rather, he understood the heart to be the “center of our being where God comes to dwell with us and bring us the divine gifts of trust, hope, and love.”

Henri believed that God has given human beings a heart that will remain restless until it has found full communion with God and our fellow human beings.

He taught that one of the keys to finding communion with God is to live in the present.

“We must believe deeply that what is most important is the here and the now,” he wrote.

Instead of allowing ourselves to be constantly distracted by things that have happened in the past or that might happen in the future, we must remain focused on the present.
For Henri, although we ought to experience our lives in the present moment, we should also be grateful to God for our lives as a whole.

“True spiritual gratitude,” he wrote, “embraces all of our past, the good as well as the bad events, the joyful as well as the sorrowful moments.”

Since all the moments that have taken place in our lives have brought us to this present moment, we should be grateful for all of it as part of God’s guidance.

Although not every moment of the past was good, even the bad happened within the loving presence of God.

Even so, Henri admitted that it is hard to keep bringing all of our past under the light of gratitude because there are many things about which we feel guilt and shame, and that we wish had never happened.

However, we need to have the courage to look at our whole life—even the bad parts—as God looks at it. Then our guilt and our shame bring us to a deeper recognition and appreciation of God’s mercy, forgiveness, and love.

In his book *Life of the Beloved*, Henri teaches that we are all God’s Beloved.

He wrote, “We are intimately loved long before our parents, teachers, spouses, children, and friends loved us or wounded us. That’s the truth spoken by the voice that says, ‘You are my Beloved.’”

We have all been wounded one way or another. Our hearts, our minds, and our physical bodies are fragile. We wound easily.

Everyone you meet has been wounded and will be wounded again, sometime—maybe many times. Life is like that.

Jesus was wounded. He wept tears of anguish in the Garden of Gethsemane. His head was pierced by a crown of thorns. His back was scourged. He suffered the pounding of nails in his hands and feet and the sharp point of a lance in his side.

Most of us have not suffered that badly, but we have all been wounded—one way or another—in our hearts, minds, and bodies.

We are all wounded.

We are all called to help heal the wounds of others.

Henri Nouwen was known as the “wounded healer.”
You and I should be known that way too.

That’s a pretty good title, a good job description, a good legacy.

We were wounded by life, we survived, we did our best to help heal the wounds of others, and we thanked God for all of it.

For all of it—even the wounds.