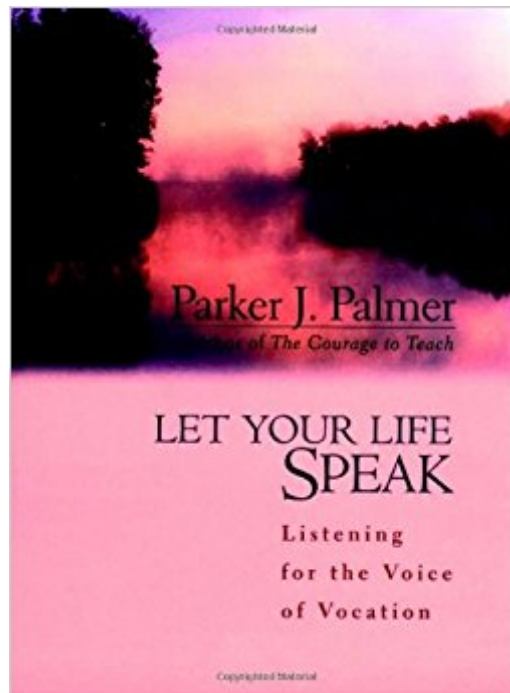




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# **Let Your Life Speak: Listening For The Voice Of Vocation**



## Synopsis

With wisdom, compassion, and gentle humor, Parker J. Palmer invites us to listen to the inner teacher and follow its leadings toward a sense of meaning and purpose. Telling stories from his own life and the lives of others who have made a difference, he shares insights gained from darkness and depression as well as fulfillment and joy, illuminating a pathway toward vocation for all who seek the true calling of their lives.

## Book Information

Hardcover: 128 pages

Publisher: Jossey-Bass; 1 edition (September 10, 1999)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0787947350

ISBN-13: 978-0787947354

Product Dimensions: 5.1 x 0.6 x 7.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 5.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars 347 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #3,323 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #5 in [Books > Religion & Spirituality > Religious Studies > Sociology](#) #5 in [Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Christian Living > Business & Professional Growth](#) #9 in [Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Education](#)

## Customer Reviews

The old Quaker adage, "Let your life speak," spoke to author Parker J. Palmer when he was in his early 30s. It summoned him to a higher purpose, so he decided that henceforth he would live a nobler life. "I lined up the most elevated ideals I could find and set out to achieve them," he writes. "The results were rarely admirable, often laughable, and sometimes grotesque.... I had simply found a 'noble' way of living a life that was not my own, a life spent imitating heroes instead of listening to my heart." Thirty years later, Palmer now understands that learning to let his life speak means "living the life that wants to live in me." It involves creating the kind of quiet, trusting conditions that allow a soul to speak its truth. It also means tuning out the noisy preconceived ideas about what a vocation should and shouldn't be so that we can better hear the call of our wild souls. There are no how-to formulas in this extremely unpretentious and well-written book, just fireside wisdom from an elder who is willing to share his mistakes and stories as he learned to live a life worth speaking about. --Gail Hudson

A gifted academic who formerly combined a college teaching career with community organizing, Palmer took a year's sabbatical to live at the "intentional" Quaker community of Pendle Hill in Pennsylvania. Instead of leaving at year's end, he became the community's dean of studies and remained there for 10 years. Palmer (*The Courage to Teach*) shares the lessons of his vocational and spiritual journey, discussing his own burnout and intense depression with exceptional candor and clarity. In essays that previously appeared in spiritual or educational journals and have been reworked to fit into this slim volume, he suggests that individuals are most authentic when they follow their natural talents and limitations, as his own story demonstrates. Since hearing one's "calling" requires introspection and self-knowledge (as suggested by the eponymous Quaker expression), Palmer encourages inner work such as journal-writing, meditation and prayer. Recognizing that his philosophy is at odds with popular, essentially American attitudes about self-actualization and following one's dreams, Palmer calls vocation "a gift, not a goal." He deftly illustrates his point with examples from the lives of people he admires, such as Rosa Parks, Annie Dillard and Vaclav Havel. A quiet but memorable addition to the inspirational field, this book has the quality of a finely worked homily. The writing displays a gentle wisdom and economy of style that leaves the reader curious for more insight into the author's Quaker philosophy. (Oct.) Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc.

This is a fantastic book that helped me to make some important decisions regarding the direction of my career when I was at a crossroads in my life. The premise upon which this book is basically based on the old adage, "To Thy Own Self Be True," but this book goes very much beyond this - it actually unpacks this adage and applies it concretely to one's career choices and other things. It also seems to hold up a mirror to the things that we tell ourselves that prevent us from leading a more vocationally liberated life. Truly, I have been a world-weary reader of inspirational books, but this is one new read that I absolutely loved! Thank you Parker Palmer for writing this illuminating book!

What a heart-warming, gentle, affirming, and inspiring little book this is. I think it will be hard for me to review this book without engaging in a "what it has meant to me" discourse. This isn't a bad thing, but I think before starting down that path, I should share a few of the technical specifics about this book first. As I mentioned in my opening statements, this is a small book...physically small and then only slightly over one hundred pages including notes and credits. Don't let the size fool you; Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation is a very rich and spiritually deep book. Palmer

shares in the introduction that *Let Your Life Speak* consists primarily as a collection of essays appearing in other publications from the past decade (1990-2000?). He goes on to state the essays have been rewritten (some substantially) so this book would be "coherent whole" and not just a collection of articles. It is my opinion that Mr. Palmer succeeded in his goal. I found the book very organic and flowing in the spirit of its intent. The book traces Parker's journey of self-discovery with honest, transparency, and humility. Fitting, it seems, for a book of this nature and caliber. Perhaps "self-discovery" might be a misleading way of portraying the journey unfolded in *Let Your Life Speak*. The measure of discovery is found in the unraveling of the true-self and the false-self. We are told in the pursuit of the Christian faith that "God has a plan and purpose for your life..." While this teaching about personal and vocational purpose for our lives may be true, discovering it in the truest context of God's plan can be perplexing at times. Each person's journey may not be the same and the discovery of the true-self as we pertain to the image of God may be unique to each of us, but there are some similarity and common experience that lead us to and through these discoveries of the true self. Palmer's journey provides an inspiring parallel for us to examine our own journey...both the inner and the vocational---which are not necessarily separate or mutually exclusive."The figure calling to me all those years was, I believe, what Thomas Merton calls "true self." This is not the ego self that wants to inflate us (or deflate us, another from of self-distortion), not the intellectual self that wants to hover above the mess of life in clear but ungrounded ideas, not the ethical self that wants to live by some abstract moral code. It is the self-planted in us by the God who made us in God's own image-- the self that wants nothing more, or less, than for us to be who we were created to be... True self is true friend. One ignores or rejects such friendship only at one's peril." Parker Palmer; *Let Your Life Speak* I have benefited greatly from the writings of other spiritual masters on this topic (John of the Cross, Teresa Avila, Thomas Merton, and M. Basil Pennington to name a few). Palmer's voice and experience bring fresh insight to these masters as well as sharing practical relevance with them as well. I found the teaching of this little book to be a great addition to my library and a worthy example of the disciple who is truly seeking to answer the question: "Is the life I am living the same as the life that wants to live in me?" I make the assumption; right or wrong, that the life Parker refers to is the Christ-life. Honestly seeking to surrender to the life Christ desires to live in and through us is the sum of what discipleship is about in my understanding. *Let Your Life Speak* is very helpful in gently walking the seeker along in this process.

I picked up this book after reading Palmer's *Courage to Teach*. There is a lot of repetition between the two books. That and the fact that its overall message is not too profound from other books of this

nature makes this book seem somewhat unoriginal. He does assume periodically that the reader is not living in poverty nor is of other minority, struggling status. He makes an easy, well-written argument based on his own life experiences which gives way towards a good reminder for anyone that the truth to who we are is within us. If you need a lift, reassurance, or guidance to the current choices or feelings you are having in life, this is a good light read to tap you along.

I really loved this little book. I don't usually write in the margins, but I could not resist in this case, because his writing is so beautiful and resonated with my life experiences at good jobs and bad. This is not a typical job counseling sort of book, will you look at where you want to be in five years and what you're good at, where the market is, and pick a job. Through soul-searching, Palmer found his calling, and invites us to do the same — observing and accepting our flaws and non-gifts as well as the ways in which we are uniquely gifted. He says, "The attempt to live by the reality of our own nature, which means our limits as well as our potentials, is a profoundly moral regimen." We have all heard the saying, "do what you love and the money will follow." What Palmer is saying is that we need to do what we love because to do otherwise is to deny the world our unique selves, and at the same time hold ourselves in a cage of inauthenticity. This is career counseling as spiritual practice.

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