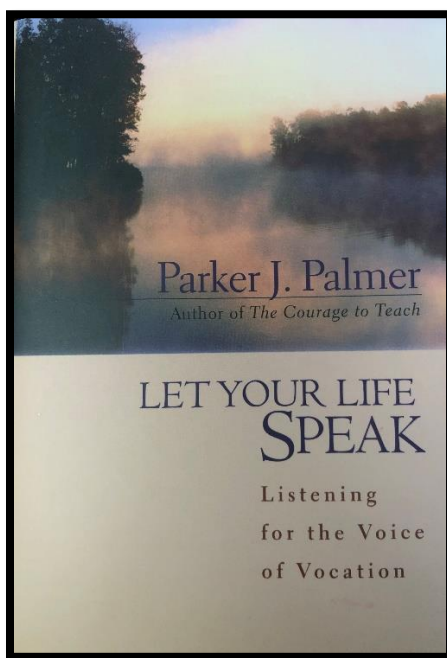


***Let Your Life Speak* Book Study**



We're glad you are going deeper this season with this study of Parker Palmer's book, *Let Your Life Speak*. Dr. Palmer is a well-known author, educator, and activist who tells stories of his own life experience to help us listen to the inner voice in our own lives. *Let Your Life Speak* is available on Amazon.

"Is the life I am living the same life that wants to live in me?"

This is the question that Parker Palmer invite us to answer.

We have pulled key quotes from each chapter and have provided a couple questions to help us go a little deeper in our reflection.

This study can be done alone or with a group. If you are studying this book with others we find it helpful to invite the Holy Spirit into your space by lighting a candle and saying a prayer.

Blessings on your journey,

Pastor Ninabeth

Week 1 – Chapter 1 – Listening to Life

“...insight is hidden in the word vocation itself, which is rooted in the Latin for “voice.” Vocation does not mean a goal that I pursue. It means a calling that I hear. Before I can tell my life what I want to do with it, I must listen to my life telling the who I am. I must listen for the truths and values at the heart of my own identity, not the standards by which I must live-but the standards by which I cannot help but live if I am living my own life.”

How do you think we hear truths and values of our hearts?

How has your life spoken to you?

“My life is not only about my strengths and virtues; it is also about my liabilities and my limits, my trespasses and my shadow. An inevitable though often ignored dimension of the quest for ‘wholeness’ is that we must embrace what we dislike or find shameful about ourselves as well as what we are confident and proud of. That is why the poet says, ‘ask me mistakes I have made.’”

What have your mistakes taught you about your life and your vocation?

How does listening to our mistakes – as well as our successes – give us insight into our vocational calling?

Week 2 – Chapter 2 – Now I Become Myself

“Our deepest calling is to grow into our own authentic selfhood, hood, whether or not it conforms to some image of who we ought to be. As we do so, we will not only find the joy that every human being seeks-we will also find our path of authentic service in the world. True vocation joins self and service, as Frederick Buechner asserts when he defines vocation as ‘the place where your deep gladness meets the world's deep need.’”

What do you think about Buechner’s definition of vocation?

How do we go about learning our deep gladness?

How do we learn the world’s deep need?

“Legend has it that... a graduate student came to Rosa Parks and asked, ‘Why did you sit down at the front of the bus that day?’ Rosa Parks did not say that she sat down to launch a movement, because her motives were more elemental than that. She said, ‘I sat down because I was tired.’ But she did not mean that her feet were tired. She meant that her soul was tired, her heart was tired, her whole being was tired of playing by racist rules, of denying her soul's claim to selfhood... It was a moment of existential truth, of claiming authentic selfhood, of reclaiming birthright giftedness-and in that moment she set in motion a process that changed both the lay and the law of the land. Rosa Parks sat down because she had reached a point where it was essential to embrace her true vocation-not as someone who would reshape our society but as someone who would live out her full self in the world. She decided, ‘I will no longer act on the outside in a way that contradicts the truth that I hold deeply on the inside. I will no longer act as if I were less than the whole person I know myself inwardly to be.’”

How do you see the relationship between the outward societal structures and pressures, and the inward understanding of self and calling?

Are there places where the outward pressures conflict with your inner calling?

Week 3 – Chapter 3 – When Way Closes

“...in sixty-plus years of living, way has never opened in front of me.” She paused, and I started sinking into despair. Was this wise woman telling me that the Quaker concept of God's guidance was a hoax? Then she spoke again, this time with a grin. ‘But a lot of way has closed behind me, and that's had the same guiding effect.’ I laughed with her, laughed loud and long, the kind of laughter that comes when a simple truth exposes your heart for the needlessly neurotic mess it has become. Ruth's honesty gave me a new way to look at my vocational journey, and my experience has long since confirmed the lesson she taught me that day: there is as much guidance in what does not and cannot not happen in my life as there is in what can and does-maybe maybe more.”

How can paths that close behind us give us guidance in our vocation?

When have closed paths guided you?

“As slowly as the ripening fruit

Fertile, detached, and always spent,

Falls but does not exhaust the root...’

When the gift I give to the other is integral to my own nature, when it comes from a place of organic reality within me, it will renew itself-and me-even as I give it

away. Only when I give something that does not grow within me do I deplete myself and harm the other as well, for only harm can come from a gift that is forced, inorganic, unreal.”

Have you experienced the kinds of giving that Palmer uses this poem to illustrate?

What does this kind of giving have to do with living our vocation?

Week 4 – Chapter 4 – All the Way Down

“Blessedly, there were several people, family and friends, who had the courage to stand with me in a simple and healing way... Bill rarely spoke a word. When he did, he never gave advice but simply mirrored my condition. He would say, "I can sense your struggle today," or, "It feels like you are getting stronger." I could not always respond, but his words were deeply helpful: they reassured me that I could still be seen by someone-life-giving knowledge in the midst of an experience that makes one feel annihilated and invisible. It is impossible to put into words what my friend's ministry meant to me. Perhaps it is enough to say that I now have deep appreciation for the biblical stories of Jesus and the washing of feet.' The poet Rainer Maria Rilke says, 'love ... consists in this, that two solitudes protect and border and salute each other.' That is the kind of love my friend Bill offered. He never tried to invade my awful inwardness with false comfort or advice; he simply stood on its boundaries, modeling the respect for me and my journey-and the courage to let it be-that that I myself needed if I were to endure.“

How does this kind of love differ from how we tend to care for or help one another?

When have you experienced this kind of love?

“Years ago, someone told me that humility is central to the spiritual life. That made sense to me: I was proud to think of myself as humble! But this person did not tell me that the path to humility, for some of us at least, goes through humiliation, where we are brought low, rendered powerless, stripped of pretenses and defenses, and left feeling fraudulent, empty, and useless—a humiliation that allows us to regrow our lives from the ground up, from the humus of common ground. The spiritual journey is full of paradoxes. One of them is that the humiliation that brings us down - down to ground on which it is safe to stand and to fall - eventually takes us to a firmer and fuller sense of self. When people ask me how it felt to emerge from depression, I can give only one answer: I felt at home in my own skin, and at home on the face of the earth, for the first time.”

How can humility be healing?

Have there been times you have experienced a “bringing low” that has brought you to a fuller sense of self?

Week 5 – Chapter 5 – Leading From Within

“Annie Dillard has given us a vivid image of what authentic spirituality is about: ‘In the deeps are the violence and terror of which psychology has warned us. But if you ride these monsters down, if you drop with them farther over the world’s rim, you find what our sciences cannot locate or name, the substrate, the ocean or matrix or ether which buoys the rest, which gives goodness its power for good, and evil its power for evil, the unified field: our complex and inexplicable caring for each other, and for our life together here.’”

Does Dillard’s image of spirituality resonate with you? How so or how not?

How does doing the deep, inner work speak to our lives and lead us in our vocational calling?

“And all of these traditions, despite their great diversity, unite in one exhortation to those who walk in their ways: “Be not afraid.” As one who is no stranger to fear, I have had to read those words with care so as not to twist them into a discouraging counsel of perfection. “Be not afraid” does not mean we cannot not have fear. Everyone has fear, and people who embrace the call to leadership often find fear abounding. Instead, the words say we do not need to be the fear we have. We do not have to lead from a place of fear, thereby engendering a world in which fear is multiplied. We have places of fear inside of us, but we have other places as well—places with names like trust and hope and faith. We can choose to lead from one of those places, to stand on ground that is not riddled with the fault lines of fear, to move toward others from a place of promise instead of anxiety. As we stand in one of those places, fear may remain close at hand and our spirits may still tremble. But now we stand on ground that will support us, ground from which we can lead others toward a more trustworthy, more hopeful, more faithful way of being in the world.”

How can fear play a role in our life’s work?

What ways have you embraced fear yet stood on solid ground?

Week 6 – Chapter 6 – There is a Season

“Despite all appearances, of course, nature is not dead in winter—it has gone underground to renew itself and prepare for spring. Winter is a time when we are admonished, and even inclined, to do the same for ourselves.

But for me, winter has an even greater gift to give. It comes when the sky is clear, the sun is brilliant, the trees are bare, and first snow is yet to come. It is the gift of utter clarity. In winter, one can walk into woods that had been opaque with summer growth only a few months earlier and see the trees clearly, singly and together, and see the ground they are rooted in.”

In what ways can you relate to Palmer’s reflections on Winter? What roots have you found in winter times?

“Though spring begins slowly and tentatively, it grows with a tenacity that never fails to touch me. The smallest and most tender shoots insist on having their way, coming up through ground that looked, only a few weeks earlier, as if it would never grow anything again. The crocuses and snowdrops do not bloom for long. But their mere appearance, however brief, is always a harbinger of hope, and from those small beginnings, hope grows at a geometric rate. The days get longer, the winds get warmer, and the world grows green again. In my own life, as my winters segue into spring, I find it not only hard to cope with mud but also hard to credit the small harbingers of larger life to come, hard to hope until the outcome is secure. Spring teaches me to look more carefully for the green stems of possibility: for the intuitive hunch that may turn into a larger insight, for the glance or touch that may thaw a frozen relationship, for the stranger's act of kindness that makes the world seem hospitable again.”

In what ways can you relate to Palmer's reflections on Spring?

What “green stems of possibility” can you see in your life?