



Parker J. Palmer

Author of *The Courage to Teach*

LET YOUR LIFE
SPEAK

Listening
for the Voice
of Vocation



OTHER BOOKS BY PARKER J. PALMER

A Hidden Wholeness

The Courage to Teach

The Courage to Teach: A Guide for Reflection and Renewal

(with Rachel Livsey)

The Active Life

To Know As We Are Known

The Company of Strangers

The Promise of Paradox

Caring for the Commonwealth (coeditor)

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SPEAK

☞ LISTENING
FOR THE VOICE
OF VOCATION

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*For Heather Marie Palmer
my granddaughter*

May you always treasure true self . . .

With the exception of Chapter I, every chapter in this book originally appeared as an essay in some other publication during the past decade. I have rewritten all the essays, most of them substantially. My aim has been to create a real book—not just a collection of articles about vocation, but a coherent exploration of a subject that engages many of us for the better part of our lives.

I mention the provenance of these pieces partly because I believe in truth in labeling and partly because the people who invited me to write the original essays, with all the trust that implies, are valued partners in my own vocation.

Chapter II, “Now I Become Myself,” was originally given as the G. D. Davidson Lecture at Warren Wilson College in Swannanoa, North Carolina, and published by the college as a pamphlet.¹ The unusual charge that accompanies the lectureship helped frame this book: reflect on your life story through the concept of vocation—“including lessons learned

from disappointments and failures as well as successes”—and do so in a way that might speak to younger as well as older adults. I am grateful to my friend Doug Orr, president of the college, for extending the invitation; to Don and Ann Davidson for endowing a lectureship that invites this sort of reflection; and to the entire Warren Wilson community for receiving my words with such deep hospitality.

Chapter III, “When Way Closes,” was originally written for *Weavings*, a quarterly journal of spirituality, at the request of its editor, John Mogabgab.² John, my good friend for many years, is one of the best companions a person could have along the way, and *Weavings*—the journal he has raised up from its infancy—is widely regarded as one of the finest periodicals of its kind.

Chapter IV, “All the Way Down,” was originally written for a special issue of *Weavings* on the theme of the “wounded healer” in memory of Henri Nouwen.³ Henri was a treasured friend and mentor to both John Mogabgab and me, and this chapter is testimony to the transcendent power of friendship. It explores my experience with depression, a subject I could not have dealt with so openly except for the support of friends still living and the spirit of a friend now gone.

Chapter V, “Leading from Within,” was originally given as a speech for the Indiana Office of Campus Ministries, which published it as a pamphlet.⁴ I am grateful to my friend Max Case, executive director, for his invitation and encouragement. Indeed, I am grateful to the many campus ministers, priests,