



WHICH WAY SHOULD I GO?

By Greg Wiens

Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation

By Parker Palmer

Jossey-Bass, 128 pp. \$18.95

I have noticed a troubling trend among leaders during these challenging economic times. They say they sense a need to leave their church or seek God's direction in doing so, but they are afraid. They fear because they are upside-down in their mortgage, or aren't sure they can sell their house. Increasingly, I see more and more pastors making decisions of "calling" based on finances rather than God's true intention for them. *Let Your Life Speak* by Parker Palmer is an excellent book for anyone seeking God's calling in an ever-changing world.

Let Your Life Speak is a compilation of five essays Palmer previously wrote for various spiritual and educational journals. The book's title is a Quaker saying, and the premise upon which it is written: that God's call on your life today does not likely differ radically from where he's led you thus far.

If we believe in God's omniscience, then each step in our journey has been deliberately selected in preparation for the next. Palmer asserts that if you carefully study the what, where, how and why of your past, there you will find direction to the future where and when. This concept is very freeing.

He gives many concrete examples of how our concept of a "calling" can become confused with preconceived notions of vocation and success so prevalent in today's competitive society. He brings clarity to the frustration we've faced in our past or present callings and how to "live the life that wants to live in you."

Palmer reveals many deep insights throughout the book. Concerning our gifts and limitations, he writes, "It is important to distinguish between two kinds of limitations: those that come with selfhood and those that are imposed by people or political forces hell-bent on keeping us 'in our place'". He is quick to point out how our own limitations hurt us, but he is also realistic enough to recognize the limitations placed upon us.

Not only is Palmer rich with wisdom, but he is generous with practical suggestions for the seeker. One practice he recommends is a "clearness committee". If you need clarity on a decision, suggests Palmer, assemble a group of trusted friends and have them ask you probing questions about the subject

without offering judgment or answers, pushing you toward God for your ultimate guidance. I have been part of this kind of process and it was wonderfully liberating to have my close friends simply ask questions and withhold solutions. It strengthened my own wisdom and maturity, which naturally paid future dividends in my walk with God.

If we want ready advice, the Internet is filled with cheap wisdom. But Parker asserts that God works your calling from deep within you. This concept alone could radically change the way pastors and leaders make decisions, to the advantage of the Kingdom.

Another helpful section is Palmer's outline of five "shadow-casting monsters" that haunt all leaders, from pastor to parent, teacher to CEO:

- Insecurity about identity and worth
- Viewing the universe as a battleground where we are to compete with everyone else
- Functional atheism: acting as if everything is up to us
- Fear, especially the fear of the chaos of life
- Denial of death in all that we work for, and the accompanying fear of failure

This short book is long on challenging your comfort level in leadership and your current calling. It is a book that every leader should read to keep their current call sharp and to ensure their next move is more consistent with God's call and less self-motivated.

If you have not read any of Parker Palmer's work, he is a joy to read. I do not always agree with him, but I am always challenged by him. I have read many of his books and every one of them has been a delight of insight and humor. His style is casual and down-to-earth. His Quaker background lends a quality of quiet reflection in all he writes; it grounds him well and bringing balance to our constantly changing culture.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT GREG WIENS, PLEASE VISIT WWW.LEADERSTHATLAST.ORG