

Let Your Life Speak by Parker J. Palmer

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Something about this statement makes me feel unsettled: “If we who are privileged find ourselves confined, it is only because we have conspired in our own imprisonment” (Palmer, 2015, pp. 77). I think I feel unsettled by this statement because within the capitalistic system of our country, which is also founded on racist ideology and laws, there is much that is imprisoning. However, I feel almost powerless to enact change. As a white woman, I am part of those who have privilege within this country and therefore in many ways I own up to the fact that this society that has propped me up and given me advantages all my life. I am not just a recipient of this society but Palmer suggests that I am also co-creator of it. In the awareness that change is stunted when people are afraid, I want to evaluate where fear is holding me back from living my life as an advocate and catalyst for change. If I feel imprisoned, it’s simply because I sat still and took no action.

I absolutely love the idea of “hidden wholeness” to which I can come when I have spent time in the deepest parts of myself and wrestled with my own darkness (Palmer, 2016, pp.81). One of the most recent times that I have had to descend into the hardest realities of my life was in a recent heartbreak where the guy that I was dating broke off our relationship to begin dating my roommate and close friend. The depth of pain that I experienced was hard to live with and yet I wanted to avoid it so badly. At first I tried to move on quickly and make sure no one had reason to feel bad for me. I wanted to deny that I felt anger because it felt wrong to see such negative emotions for someone who I had cared for so much. Eventually I couldn’t avoid dealing with the grief, sadness, confusion, shame, and anger. I knew I had to get alone and let myself feel all that needed to be felt and allow the grief process to take its time. I am completely blown away by the depth of wholeness that I have started to experience through this very messy and dysfunctional situation that I had to go through. This sense of wholeness from brokenness and heart break has come only when I go deep in solitude with God. Verbally processing with friends and counseling has its place, but I couldn’t heal and experience the slow and gentle waves of forgiveness that freed me from hate until I was in the deepest darkness place in my heart alone with God. This whole experience of descending into the dark places felt scary and unsettling to me just like the story that Palmer shared of rappelling down the cliff. But now I know that I am stronger for the experience and I can forgive even when it felt impossible.

Wow, what a powerful sentence! “We are here not only to transform the world but also to be transformed” (Palmer, 2016, pp. 97). I resonate with the metaphor of agricultural growth from a seed to seedlings to a stronger plant. I worked on a vegetable farm for several summers in high school and college and it was amazing work being part of the greenhouse seeding process, planting in the field, maintaining fields, harvesting and planting again. It takes time to allow something to grow. Not everything can just be *made* so quickly and abruptly like we’d like to think. I think it has been helpful for me and will continue to be helpful for me to identify my current season of life by comparing it to the four seasons of the year. This helps me in the helping profession of social work because as I stay closely connected to myself – the seasons of joy and growth that are full of life and the seasons that feel lifeless and completely drained – I will be able to care for my needs and not exhaust myself through overcompensating or another poor coping mechanism. In leading myself well to places of rest and restoration, I will hopefully help others do the same.

References

Palmer, P. J. (2015). *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation*. Wiley.