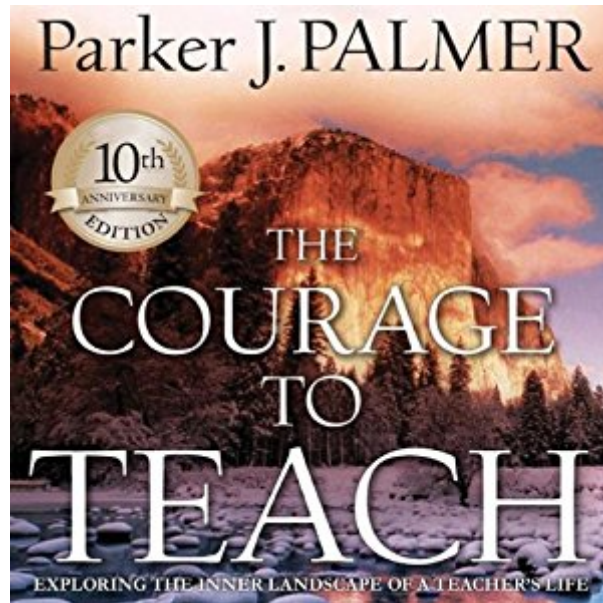


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# The Courage To Teach: Exploring The Inner Landscape Of A Teacher's Life



## Synopsis

"This book is for teachers who have good days and bad -- and whose bad days bring the suffering that comes only from something one loves. It is for teachers who refuse to harden their hearts, because they love learners, learning, and the teaching life." - Parker J. Palmer [from the Introduction] Teachers choose their vocation for reasons of the heart, because they care deeply about their students and about their subject. But the demands of teaching cause too many educators to lose heart. Is it possible to take heart in teaching once more so that we can continue to do what good teachers always do -- give heart to our students? In *The Courage to Teach*, Parker Palmer takes teachers on an inner journey toward reconnecting with their vocation and their students -- and recovering their passion for one of the most difficult and important of human endeavors.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In many ways, it is itself an act of courage to read this book. Mr. Palmer has taken the rare, difficult task of probing to the heart of the learning experience and seeks to reveal its essence for any teacher willing to explore with him. In this task--like a good teacher--he asks more questions than he answers and he is concerned in discovering the process and the means of learning and teaching. For me, what lingers after finishing the short book are two key concepts he identifies: identity and integrity. For each individual teacher, the need to have some balanced perspective of self-identity becomes paramount. Do I teach to peddle my agenda? Do I teach in order to be the 'big

fish in a little pond'? Do I teach because I like the stage? Or, Do I teach in order to fulfill an inner yearning, even sadness?. Next, the balance of integrity must center a good teacher. Do I seek fairness among my students? Do I build good habits of discipline? Do I live justly? Eschew competition? Seek first of all to teach meaning, itself a subject-centered approach? See? These are the kinds of questions that echo in my mind after reading *The Courage To Teach*. I particularly like what Mr. Palmer had to say regarding fear, teaching from fear, and hiding among our fears while facing them. Beauty lies in the paradox. Now, I look for those critical moments in teaching for what they are. I strive to find my identity in my students' faces; I am challenged to live with integrity in my heart AND in my mind. No student of educational reform should be without this book. One more thing: if nothing else, read this book for the research and precious quotes that Mr. Palmer uses. His endnotes are worth the price alone.

What made us teachers in the first place? Palmer asks. We fell in love with a subject that spoke to us deeply and personally. Why does that initial inspiration so often leave us, and the daily grind of the job take its place? Palmer tries to restore that depth, that bright inspiration that got us going as teachers in the first place. It will take courage, he points out, for us teachers to speak and act from that deep place where our subject inspires us; but for our students' sake, and for the sake of our own souls, we must take that courage. His story on page 59 of the shop teacher who finally grasped the courage to be honest with his principal is one of the most heartening stories I've ever read. The entire book speaks powerfully to both the mind and heart of those of us who teach. And it also gives news of a national movement forming to bring teachers into dialogue with each other about the spiritual dimensions of their teaching. This is a much-needed book, one that inspires teachers to hope and to dare to be fully human in their living and their teaching.

I've been teaching 9 years and had begun to think the toll was just too great. If you invest your emotional energy into your students, you are at risk for some very personal feelings of rejection.... and it can come from parents and administrators, as well as the students. This book probably saved me from quitting or self-destructing. Because Palmer so squarely defines this risk and compassionately encourages his reader (we're all teachers in some respect) with explanation and appreciation, it allows the teacher to once again feel that he/she is making the sacrifice for a worthy and noble cause. I loved this book.

Though not an easy book to read, as a teacher of some thirty years I find this book to be

challenging, inspiring and definitely thought-provoking. Too often we as teachers rely on the tried and true and as a result become somewhat stale. Mr. Palmer is challenging us to reexamine not only our teaching styles but ourselves as teachers. I shall read it through time and again and would definitely recommend it to anyone who has the heart and soul of a teacher.

"The Courage to Teach" should be read again and again. It invokes new insights into your teaching career every time at various points in your life. The concepts are inspiring, and the conclusions honest. If I have any complaints, it's that at times in the book, the language became a bit thick and abstract, losing the reader in extensive passages that might need to be reread several times to fully understand. For example, a sentence from page 105 reads: "In rejecting the objectivist model, I have not embraced a relativism that reduces truth to whatever the community decides, for the community of truth includes a transcendent dimension of truth-knowing and truth-telling that takes us beyond relativism and absolutism alike." To be fair, this quote is taken out of context, and I know that the book is not meant to be read like a pleasure novel... it's much deeper and more thought-provoking than that. It's a real gem when Palmer describes examples of his points from classroom experiences, but I found myself choking on the pages of abstract language separating these examples. It took me longer than expected to finish. Despite my minor misgivings, I highly recommend the book... especially to teachers. It'll be a permanent fixture on my bookshelf for years.

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