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I pick up my journal and write, "Why does this 'writing' thing continue to haunt me?"

I have been journaling since I was 10 years old. In college, I majored in English literature. I wanted to become a skilled writer and achieve a level of recognition.

Then I raised a family and fell into a career doing administrative work. At age 52, I became a high school English teacher. I spent the next 10 years teaching students literary terms, grammar, text analysis and creative writing. I wanted to teach my students to become better writers — inserting copious notes in the margins of their papers and holding after school conferences to help them, all because I loved writing so much. You would think that now, four years after retirement, I could let go of expectations of achieving more worldly success with my "gift."

Yet here I am with a journal filled with ruminations like, "Should I submit this essay for publication?" "Should I write that book?" "Should I write about this or that on my blog?" Often these questions are answered with the response, "No, you're happy enough just journaling. Your writing is for you."

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What stops us from going all in with what we believe are our God-given talents? For me, it's that nagging voice that reminds me there are so many people who write better than I do. It's the wagging tongue of the ego that says that I'm not good enough.

Do you have a talent, but still second-guess your ability? Do you love to write, draw, paint, sing, teach, make music, dance, cook, garden, make jewelry, quilt or take photos? And though you dream about bringing it to the next level, you stop short because you've listened to that strident voice within — the one that says, "Stop, you're not good enough."

Do you, like me, tend to listen to what Franciscan Fr. Richard Rohr calls "[the false self](#)" rather than to "[the still small voice](#)" of God (1 Kings 19:11-12) that softly reassures you that everything right now is all right? In seeking fame or perfection, do you, too, reject the use of the very gifts that God has given you?

I recently watched the new Pixar movie, "[Soul](#)." Although "Soul" has no obvious religious theme, locations called "The Great Before" and "The Great Beyond" suggest eternity spent in a good or bad place, as well as another place for "lost souls." The characters and theme of "Soul" came to mind as I prayed about how I listen to God's voice.

The main character, Joe, obsesses about following the "spark" of his life as a jazz pianist. His ego desires fame and fortune, and he feels stuck in his career as a middle school band teacher. When his big break finally comes and he has earned a spot in a famous jazz band, he believes that he has reached his destiny. But before the big event, Joe has an accident and discovers that he is on his way to The Great Beyond. He is devastated and struggles mightily to resist the forces pulling him.

As events unfurl, Joe meets 22, a soul who clings to her existence in The Great Before, determined that she wants nothing to do with life on earth. The relationship between Joe and 22 drives the plot and, eventually, through his relationship with her, Joe learns that the best part of life is *living* it, and as a reward he receives a second chance at life. We aren't shown Joe's second time around, but I suspect that in a sequel, Joe would do more than play jazz. My guess is that Joe would think less about his "spark" and would find joy in teaching music to his less-than-stellar middle school students and he would revel in his encounters.

God's voice comes to us in mysterious ways. Watching Joe cling to his dream captured my imagination and helped me to see what God was revealing to me. Joe's musical talent brought him joy with or without fame or fortune. He learned that using his talent was to live life to the fullest on the spot where he was standing.

I began to see how God calls me to use my talent, being open to using it wherever it's needed. The joy that writing gives me, the words that God reveals to me are meant to be shared. At times, the best times, they may simply be shared in how I live in relationship with others.

By listening to God, we can gain the confidence to use the gifts that bring us joy, even if we never gain notice or aren't perfect. Our gifts, our "sparks," are not our soul's purpose. Being fully present in every minute of life with what we've been given and whom we're with is.