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Making Room for God in Your Life with Tommy Thompson

James Early [00:00:01]:

Hey there and welcome again to The Bible Speaks to You Podcast. I'm so grateful you've tuned in to listen today. This week, I have a wonderful guest. I know you're gonna appreciate Tommy Thompson. We're gonna be talking about how to create space in your life when you feel overwhelmed and overloaded, and why that's important for your spiritual well-being. Hey, Tommy. Welcome to the Bible to Speaks to You Podcast.

Tommy Thompson [00:00:28]:

Well, thanks so much, James. I've really been looking forward to our conversation and Thanks so much for having me.

James Early [00:00:37]:

Yeah. So glad you're here. Let me tell you a little bit about Tommy. Tommy is a native of Richmond, Virginia. He graduated from Davidson College with a BS in sociology, and he went on to get his masters of divinity from Union Theological Seminary. Over the last 35 years, he's been in a wide array of businesses including retail Manufacturing and service. He's been in startups. He's also acquired businesses. And in each of these, Activities he's been either CFO or CEO and sometimes both. He served for the last 15 years as a partner and CFO of Washington DC South. It's a land development company actively developing over 2,000 acres between Richmond and Washington DC. I didn't know there was any land left down there to develop Tommy's also the founder and owner of the Thomson Coaching and Consulting. He provides coaching and consulting and resources for those really wanting to integrate and maximize who they are in all areas of their life. And Tommy also has a podcast. It's called Space for Life, and he released his first book in the fall of 2021 called "Space to Breathe Again, Hope for the Overloaded and Overwhelmed." When Tommy is not working, which sounds like he's doing most of the time with all that stuff going on. He mentors a lot of people, and he is an avid golfer. Tommy has been married to his wife, Weasey, for over 41 years. He has 2 amazing sons, Chris and Alex, and 2 wonderful daughters-in-law, Makena and Nina. Tommy, thanks again for being here, taking some time out, and really grateful here to have you to talk about this whole idea because we all get overwhelmed in our lives. Too much to do. We fill our schedules with all this stuff, and that's kind of one of the reasons you wrote your book, isn't it?

Tommy Thompson [00:02:50]:

Well, exactly. And it's because I struggle so much with it myself. You could tell a little bit just from the bio that I'm prone to wants to do a lot of different things, and I've been involved in a lot of different ventures. And On top of those things, been very active as a teacher in our church and elder and So I'm wired to want to do a lot. And so I've constantly battled with getting myself into a problem of being overloaded and overwhelmed. So Everything that I've written about and speak about in my podcast comes out of really struggling and often failing in those issues. and

the lessons that got all day through that really over many decades. And so this is a Subject that is near and dear to me, and I believe is also critical for our culture. as our culture is so wired to try to infuse more and more into our lives and into Christians' lives in such a way that I think it chokes the life out of things. And I don't believe it's the life that God intends for us. I don't believe it's actually what the Bible teaches for us. And so this has become a really important, I think, foundational issue to me in terms of our spiritual life.

James Early [00:04:21]:

Oh, wow. That that just really hits a chord with me. Was there any one thing you said it was over many years, but was there anything that was sort of the original catalyst? for you realizing that you needed to have a little more margin or or white space in your life?

Tommy Thompson [00:04:39]:

I really kinda reached a breaking point this probably in my early thirties, and I graduated from seminary and moved Contrary to people's expectations immediately into business with my brother, and within a few years had 4 different businesses that we were running, 2 that were located in Virginia Beach that I had to commute to, and 2 in Richmond. At the same time, I was an elder in the church and teaching Sunday school. And at the same time, we were beginning our family. And these were all good things. And in my mind, I thought, well, you know, I wanna give all of my life to God. I want to sacrifice as much as He calls me to sacrifice and as a result in a sense go as hard as he needs me to go. And so I kept on pushing and pushing and the more I did, the more I became overloaded and the more I became overloaded, I kind of became miserable in the midst of it. Yeah. Our business began to struggle. So now I had the stress on top of the overload, and I can remember lying in bed one night really about the beginning of 1990. My daughter had just been born, and I could feel this business imploding around me, and I had so much going on and for the first time I was completely in over my head, and I felt I felt in essence a nervous breakdown coming. I could feel that the bed spinning around me and thinking, there's no way out of this. Totally. And that kind of Pinnacle moment was when I realized something had to change. And it was at that time by God's grace, I came across the book Margin by Richard Swenson. And for the first time in my Christian life, which had been a Christian for, you know, 15, 20 years. The concept was introduced that God does not desire for us to live overloaded, overwhelm lives. That God does not desire to crush us just for his kingdom.

James Early [00:07:04]:

Thank goodness.

Tommy Thompson [00:07:05]:

Thank goodness. Exactly. And that was a brand new concept, and that started a path of beginning to create some space in our lives. And it was a long process, one that I thought initially was gonna be very easy now that I knew what the problem was, but was so much harder to put into practice. So our first step was beginning to practice the Sabbath, no one day where we did not work. And it was totally counterintuitive. I thought, You know, if I can't get everything done in 7

days, how am I going to get it done in 6 days? So it was really an exercise, obedience to say, I can't see how this is going to work, but I'm gonna do it anyway. And so back to the Sabbath and then beginning to create a little bit more space in the morning to have more time with God than the 2 minute obligatory quiet. time. Saying no for the first time. All of these began a slow path to creating us space in our lives. So that began 1990. I guess that's now 33 years ago.

James Early [00:08:20]:

Wow. Wow. So you've been at this a while. You know, that's really, really good. Just as a little aside, I was thinking about, in getting ready for our conversation today, I was thinking about, you know, the importance of space. And I remembered when I was in 9th grade, I was on the journalism club, and we put together the monthly newspaper, and we also put together the yearbook. And I can remember the teacher who was kind of our supervisor. She said, You need to remember the importance of white space around pictures and copy because the eye needs a break. You can't have things so crammed in there. You have to have that white space. It's like having a mat around a picture or a frame around a picture. Not every picture needs that. Not every page on a in a yearbook had the same format, but I learned the importance of that just in that very practical way, but what you're saying is we need that in our lives. And the other part I I really appreciate you saying is that God wants us to have these spaces in our lives. He doesn't want us to be so overloaded that we're just worn out at the end of every day.

Tommy Thompson [00:09:41]:

To your point and to your story, one of the illustrations that I put in my book is I took a paragraph that I wrote and right below it took that exact same paragraph and took out all of the spaces in between the words.

James Early [00:09:59]:

I saw that in your book.

Tommy Thompson [00:10:01]:

Yeah. And had the words just run on and run on. And the point of the illustration was That second paragraph without the spaces was much more efficient, but it was so much more difficult to gain any meaning out of. Without the space, we couldn't discern meaning. Yes. It's efficient. Yes. You can go, actually, you couldn't go quickly through it. which is kind of ironic to it. But that illustration just like yours from the journalism class shows in virtually every area of our life. It's the space that we punctuate things with that gives meaning and purpose joy and peace to our experiences.

James Early [00:10:50]:

Yeah. Were there ever times when you feel like Jesus was overwhelmed or felt overloaded, Because I can think of several times when he sort of created space for himself. I mean, he did you made an interesting point in your book. He had this Jesus and his disciples had the same

1,440 minutes in a day that you and I do. And but he didn't seem to rush around like, Oh my gosh. You gotta get here. Gotta do this. Oh my gosh. You got so much to do. He just took it in stride and went on his way. So I'd be interested if you'd kinda, you know, shed some light on how you see Jesus dealing with the same kind of what we might think was all these people clamoring for him, all this attention that people wanted to put on him, and pull them all different directions with all these their requests. How did Jesus deal with those kinds of challenges that we have all the time?

Tommy Thompson [00:11:51]:

I think if you if you read the gospels with different eyes, you can begin to see that he did deal with things different. And we certainly had tremendous pressures on him exerted from the outside. But I think of the time that he went to heal. I think it was Jairus's son and There was an urgency. That son was dying, and yet as he walked along,

James Early [00:12:21]:

It was actually his daughter.

Tommy Thompson [00:12:23]:

Oh, okay. Okay. Great. Thank you. When he stopped the middle of that to take care of the woman who had the situation of bleeding in the middle of that and took the time -- Yeah. -- to say you know, this is this is what is here at the moment. Same thing with the Lazarus. When Lazarus died, Jesus purposefully took 2 days before he left to go take care of things. So he had a sense of the bigger picture of time that I think we often miss that God's in this. Dallas Willard was once asked what one word he would use to describe Jesus. As I read that I thought, well, okay, what are the words that I would think about? The word that he came up with was: relaxed.

James Early [00:13:20]:

Oh.

Tommy Thompson [00:13:21]:

And when I heard that that just shows how far I am from who Jesus is. And whether you agree to There's just a there was a different sense about Jesus that never did seem to rush.

James Early [00:13:38]:

Yeah. He was unhurried. Yeah. That's a really interesting point. Well, I was thinking of several times when Jesus was kinda, he created space for himself. I love the point you make about Jairus's daughter. He was not rushing. He knew everything was gonna get taken care of. Well, think of when the time he was he'd been preaching, and he fed the 5,000, and he sent the crowds away, and he put his disciples on the boat and needed to be by himself.

Tommy Thompson [00:14:12]:

Yes.

James Early [00:14:14]:

Somebody pointed out to me one time that was really not too long after he'd heard about John the Baptist being beheaded. You know, he needed some time to himself to process that to whatever he did. We don't know. We don't have those prayers, but I even thought about the time when he was asleep on the boat in the middle of the storm. You know? He was getting some space. And his disciples were all freaking out but he was not worried about the situation. Other times, he prayed all night. Other times, he got up early in the morning, went off somewhere to pray, and they said, hey, why where are you? Everybody's looking for you. He took that time he needed for himself to commune with the Father. And that's what we all need to do, isn't it? You were talking about that. We need more than the 2 minute little prayer in the morning.

Tommy Thompson [00:15:07]:

Right. And I think Jesus illustrates that the whole concept of creating spaces, not just so that we will live a more comfortable easy life. It's actually the path to a more purposeful, impactful life. In fact, that's even critical to live our most purposeful impactful life. And yes, some comfort and some joy and some peace come along with it. It gets the full picture. It is the abundant life that I think Jesus calls us to.

James Early [00:15:43]:

Yeah. Yeah. Well, so but I've got a couple of questions here. Why do you think Jesus was never in a hurry? What was his mindset that he didn't get Fooled into thinking he had to rush around? What was going on in his mind do you think? I mean, I know we're sort of reading between the lines here, but Why was Jesus never in a hurry?

Tommy Thompson [00:16:09]:

Well, one of the things that I think is really clear. I love Os Guinness and his talks about the concept of the [Audience of One](#). Operating your life based on the audience of one that is God and the desire to please Him first and foremost, virtually only. That's something that you see very clearly with Jesus throughout the whole gospels is that his only call was to obey and walk according to the Father. And so because that was the only voice he was listening to he wasn't concerned with all of the pressures that the crowd wanted to put, whether people liked him or not.

James Early [00:16:57]:

Right.

Tommy Thompson [00:16:58]:

He didn't have those things that are so core to the way we tend to live our lives you know, to the audience of many, to the call and the voices inside of our own head to the impressions of others and I think that sense of absolute clarity that Jesus had about what his life was about is what allowed him to not be hurried and rushed.

James Early [00:17:29]:

Yes. So I guess the follow-up question is you kind of already answered it. You touched on it. It's like, so how do we in a conversation with somebody you're listening to what they're saying and that's important. But how do we have that audience with God. You have any thoughts about that from your own experiences or people you've worked with or talked to How do we follow Jesus a little more closely in that way? Because it's so easy to get distracted with you know, things going on in the Lord. Or we got so many different voices, and we don't know what to do, all that sort of thing.

Tommy Thompson [00:18:14]:

Yeah. I think there's actually some clear guidance. I think a lot of the parable with the sower and the different types of soils that are described. First soil is hard pan, In essence, the path, absolutely no water, no space, you know, within that. Then you have the very shallow ground. Then you have the ground with thorns and stones that choke out life, and then you have rich soil that has lots of space in it.

James Early [00:18:42]:

Wait. Wait. Just a minute. I wanna just touch on that just a little bit. Because some people may not be aware of that, but you're really right. I'm a gardener. I love to garden. And organic gardening is all about healthy soil. So could you just talk a little more about the space in healthy soil. I mean, there's a lot of air cavities in there. Right?

Tommy Thompson [00:19:05]:

Exactly. And that's what I've seen and why I've come to believe that this issue of creating space is foundational to everything because if you if you look at that parable, it's the same seed that went down into all four soils, but only one produced fruit, a 100 fold fruit. And that was the soil that was both pure and had space. And so I've become more and more convinced that it's perhaps the devil's tactic to remove space from our life and to overwhelm us with noise and distract and busyness because we now have no place for God to enter in. There are various things, and we're just grinding on our own effort trying hard with no success. And so I've learned that it's foundational to me to live everyday First out of a centered time with God, a centered spacious time with God. and then to do the best I can throughout the day to punctuate all of the events of my life with space to arrive at a meeting 5 minutes early so that I can settle and take a couple minutes breath and think about what I want that meeting to be without a radio on or without a podcast on. So I can just simply take a few minutes to listen and breathe and hear. And it's in

those spaces just like that rich top soil that I believe we learn and are able to hear God and able to orient our lives a little bit more effectively for the audience of one.

James Early [00:21:08]:

Yeah. I love that. And I'm going with this metaphor of the soil. I mean, think if the roots of your faith is rooted in soil that has space in it. I mean, that's a powerful metaphor really because that's the foundation really of The plant's gonna grow a lot better. Your faith is gonna grow. Your life is more productive that you were talking about that earlier.

Tommy Thompson [00:21:39]:

Exactly. It's also very interesting because if you look at the 3rd soil, the 3rd soil has the stones and the thorns in it. And if you think about how it describes that third soil, it says it choked the seeds. And when you think of the experience of being choked, what happens? You can't breathe. You can't catch your breath.

James Early [00:21:58]:

Oh, right. Right.

Tommy Thompson [00:22:00]:

That's the very, I think, picture of a lot of well-meaning Christians who are living their lives in absolute busyness and worries and pursuits that are actually choking the life out of them. And so I think that 3rd soil in essence is a vivid picture of our culture and what we're trying to overcome. Right. Right. So that has just become such a powerful visual to me of both what I'm trying to counter and I believe the life that God would have me live.

James Early [00:22:45]:

Yeah.

Tommy Thompson [00:22:46]:

And as such, have the experience of a 100 fold.

James Early [00:22:52]:

Yeah. That sounds pretty good, doesn't it? Yeah. I wanna come back to something you said earlier, let's see what was it. It was something about Jesus. Oh, you said Jesus had this bigger picture of things, bigger picture of time. And in your book, you talk about the difference between the 2 Greek words for time, *chronos* and *kairos*. Could you share a little insight on that? Because I thought that was a really nice touch in your book. I think most people don't understand that.

Tommy Thompson [00:23:25]:

Yeah. So *Chronos* time is clock time for all intents and purposes. And We have thousands and thousands of books out there to teach us how to better manage and be more efficient with clock time. but *Kairos* time is moments. It's experiences. It's at the right time is often how it's translated in the new testament at the appropriate time. And what I've come to understand more and more is it's those *Kairos* moments that are the precious important, impactful joyful moments of life. And so I've learned that to sit down with someone at lunch and to give them the typical time saying okay we're gonna have 45 minutes. We're gonna have 1 hour and a backup next meeting to that. We learned to give it plenty of time because that *Kairos* moment of spending some time with someone in an unrushed moment and let all that can happen from that time happen That is the most important work that I can often do in a day, not checking 20 things off my to do list. even though that gives me satisfaction. And so it's those *Kairos* times, those moments with the people that we love. those moments with God that is I think what life is all about. And so I've tried to reorient my fast running brain to say it's the moments that happened within the day. It's the experiences. It's the connections. That is what life is really about. It's what's most important to what God values the most. And you see Jesus taking that kind of time. With Mary and Martha, and with the disciples that unrushed *Kairos* time with them.

James Early [00:25:35]:

Yeah. I was just gonna say he wasn't living with *Chronos* time. He was really in the *Kairos* mindset of well, being in the right place at the right time, with the right person saying the right thing. I'm sure you've had lots of those moments. I have where God just brought you together with someone and You couldn't have orchestrated it if you tried. You couldn't have put it on your calendar. God just said it was like a gift, and I think Well, going back to this the story that you mentioned already about, Jesus was going to Jairus's house and this woman comes up and stops the process. I marvel at that because I look at this from Jairus's point of view. I mean, he's thinking, look, you can come back and talk to this lady Later, I'm in a hurry. I need you now. And Jesus lived in the moment. I actually think maybe part of this was you know, he said at the very beginning of his ministry, and he always telling his disciples to tell people about the kingdom, he said the kingdom of heaven is at hand. It's not way off in the future. I mean, it's in the future, but it's at hand too. It's here. It's now. It's near. It's accessible. Later he said the kingdom of God is within you. I think he was so conscious of that presence of God's supremacy, God's kingdom. that he didn't have to rush. He was so aware of that. That was the *Kairos* thing. It's really he was just he was living not just in the audience of one like you were talking about with God, but he was sort of in the nowness of the moment of the beauty of life. He was so regularly interrupted, and that never seemed to bother him.

Tommy Thompson [00:27:17]:

Yeah. When he was interrupted, that lady or interrupted when he was, you know, all by himself and the disciples come. He was never fazed by. that type of thing, which that really bothers me when someone interrupts me, and I've got my tasks, but you just realize what a gap there is between living in *Kairos* time and living for that audience of one, and being available for what God brings into your life and following my own agenda.

James Early [00:27:57]:

Yeah. So how can we get more in the *Kairos* time? How can we have more of those *Kairos* moments of where We're not rushed. We're there. You said you do that with people like when you have lunch with them or whatever, but how can we what's the mindset we need. I mean, you've talked about this a little already, but are there any practical things we can do to be in this audience of one?

Tommy Thompson [00:28:21]:

Well, I think there are lots of practical things we can do. I think one thing that I very imperfectly try to do is in my morning time with God, which, you know, has prayer and it has Bible study. I also journal during that time, but I also tried to take some time to think through what seems to be on the horizon for the day, the events, and try to them in my mind in terms of what they are and to try to in that time see what really is important. and what is priority that is ahead for me in the day. And if I can begin that time, which is certainly time with God but it's also for me a centering time. I want to understand. I want to think about What I know is ahead of me. I want to frame my spirit for the day that is ahead of me. I find that to be, you know, incredibly helpful for me and it's very different from the way I operated for so many years where I would wake up be in a full sprint and immediately run into the first activity without much thought and right from the first activity to the second activity And at the end of the day, be exhausted to think, wow. How many things did I check off that list? Yeah. It's a different way of operating, and it's so much more joyful to operate that way. and I think so much more impactful. And so I like to think that the slower I go which is often kind of what I work very hard on. If things are feeling rushed, I try to purposefully slow down.

James Early [00:30:29]:

Oh, that's good.

Tommy Thompson [00:30:32]:

Yeah. I go, this tendency is not serving me well, so I'm going to do opposite of what I'm inclined to do. Yeah. And so I'll slow my speed. I'll try to slow down my breathing. I'll try to do everything to say, okay. I I need to counter this tendency that I have.

James Early [00:30:52]:

You know, I think that's really really powerful, and it's so counterintuitive. If you're going too fast, trying to get everything done. Really, the only way to get more done is to slowdown, not just physically, but mentally, spiritually. One of the things I like about your book which I really enjoyed. And, again, the title of that is [Space to Breathe Again, Hope for the Overloaded and Overwhelmed](#)*. So there is hope. He gives a lot of hope. You give a lot of hope in this book, which is good. But this whole theme of breathing throughout the book, you have all these little boxes. It's like you call it a breathing exercise. It's not like yoga or something where you're -- Right. -- but it's like breathing in ideas, breathing out Clutter in your heart. But I mean, it's more

of a spiritual sense of breathing. And finding spacing. I really appreciated those little times, and they were a moment to breathe deeply in in a spiritual sense of thinking about some of these things, not rushing off to the next idea in the book, but to take the idea play with it a little bit, see how it applies. Anyway, I thought those were really nicely done in the book because it helps you actually do what you're talking about as you go in the book.

Tommy Thompson [00:32:16]:

Well, well, thanks. It's something that was a strong hope and desire of mine to not just have esoteric thoughts that were out there encouraging people that got wants us to live better lives. But to give very practical suggestions and to realize that it's the practices and habits that form who we are. And so if we're really going to make progress in this area. It has to be more than just a concept in our minds. It has to be a concept that's translated into very specific practices and very specific habits that can begin to undo the things that are the natural current of our culture.

James Early [00:33:08]:

Oh, man. So these two next questions are kinda related. So I'll just kinda ask him at the same time. Let's say someone is where you were years ago, They're just racing ahead. They jump out of bed with their feet already in their shoes almost, and they're just off to the horse races. Trying to get everything done. They're overloaded. They're overwhelmed. They're burning out. And they know they need to slow down, but they're afraid if they do, they won't get it all done. I mean, you've been there. What would you say to someone that needs to do all this that we're talking about finding space in life? How would you encourage them to take that first step and maybe what would that first step be?

Tommy Thompson [00:33:53]:

Well, I really believe that scripturally there are a couple of rhythms that are clear in Scripture. One is you have a daily rhythm. You know, there is you know, you have a 24 hour day. It goes all the way back to Genesis see it throughout Scripture. You have a daily rhythm, but you also have a weekly rhythm in there. And so I think if someone came to me, I'd say, well, let's just take some baby steps with this. Good. And so a first baby step that you could take would be to say I'm going to go from 5 minutes to 15 minutes in the morning. And you can find 10 minutes. Just go to bed 10 minutes earlier and make as a priority in your life to give yourself 15 minutes or maybe even a half an hour to spend time and use that time, yes, to center in with God, but also center in on your day and the spirit that you want to go into the day. And then I would really challenge them to say, Begin to practice the Sabbath even if you're beginning by taking 3 hours off where you don't touch your phone and you don't do anything that qualifies as work in your mind. Just begin, taste and see and then come back and tell me whether your life is better or worse as a result.

James Early [00:35:22]:

Yeah. I love that.

Tommy Thompson [00:35:26]:

And then expand that into some other areas. Well maybe begin and just try as an experiment to drive for a week without the radio on. What does that do for you? And so these practices just you begin to walk and take small little steps and you realize how much you're missing out on by trying to do everything in life.

James Early [00:35:53]:

You know, I love your idea about the radio. I never have been much of a radio listener, but more recently, I've listened to podcasts and I was driving my daughter back to school recently, and it's about a 3 hour drive. And so we chatted on the way there, but driving home, I had 3 or 4 podcasts that I really wanted to listen to, some of my friends and things that I follow, and the whole 3 hours. I started off, and I after about 10 minutes, I just couldn't. I needed that space. I was like, I've got 3 hours to be alone with God. Nobody's talking to me. The phone's not ringing. It was wonderful. I felt like I really wasn't that audience of one, so I really know what you're talking about. Yeah. I love that idea. So if you're listening here and you've always got the radio on, you always have to have in the background something going on. Turn it off. Try it. Like Tommy said, try it for a week and see if it makes a difference. I love that. So let's say then somebody realizes, okay. I gotta do this. I realize I need to, and I'm going to, and they start taking those baby steps. How do you declutter your mind and your heart? All these voices in your head, all these things going on in your life externally. How do we declutter that and actually make well? you kind of explained that. How do we make that time? How do we keep making more of it? And maybe at the heart of this question is really what's our motivation? I mean, just to do it for its sake is not bad, but there's gotta be some deeper spiritual motivation here. There's gotta be a reason that we wanna do this. that we may not see at first. What is it that should really impel this decision to have more space in our lives?

Tommy Thompson [00:37:50]:

Well, sometimes, honestly, it's desperation. You know, life is not working and as much as we'd love to have the right spiritual motivation for why we're doing this. We just find that we're miserable and life is caving in around us in relationships aren't working and not happy, and there's just not much going right. And so out of desperation we say we need something different and better. And then as we begin to create this space in this surprising way God shows up in the midst of that space. and we begin to see that, oh, yeah. I needed space because I just needed to breathe, but God came and met me in that space in a special way. And so sometimes we don't come at things with the purest of motivations. And do you just seem okay with that? Come to me. All you burdened and heavy laden. I'll give you rest. Yeah. You know? And he seems to be okay with that.

James Early [00:39:02]:

You know, that's actually pretty comforting because we don't always have the best motives. And, actually, what you just said made me realize sometimes somebody might be racing so hard. They don't realize. They're overwhelmed. They're so used to that. It seems so normal, but you kinda

described if someone's experiences those symptoms like a relationship not working or always something wrong at work or whatever it is, We need to pay attention to those symptoms that might be the first realization that we do need to make a change in our lives. So I'm glad you pointed that out.

Tommy Thompson [00:39:40]:

Well, I find a lot of people particularly these days as I describe some of these things will respond back by saying, I could never do that. I can't stand to be silent or by myself. And We've talked ourselves into we're afraid of creating space because that space creates emptiness and that emptiness scares the daylight out of us. Why? Lot of people think I hear what you're saying but that absolutely terrifies me and I'd rather just run as fast as I can.

James Early [00:40:21]:

You know, I'm glad you brought that up because that was pretty much my next question is, in your book, you talk about the importance of solitude. And I know people, and you talked about people who are afraid of this space. They're afraid of the solitude. Why do you think that's so? Why are people afraid of being alone, having too much space? They fill up their days with activities so they don't have to think something. Well, why is it that we're afraid of that solitude in the space, the quietness?

Tommy Thompson [00:40:54]:

I think at some level, if we create space, it introduces some of the truth and reality about ourselves that parts of life are not going well. that we're not as impressive as we want everybody else to think as we try to convince ourselves. We are forced at some level when we create space to base our own brokenness. And That's difficult. You know, that's scary for a lot of people to look at, and they'd rather inoculate themselves from that. I think that self-awareness and that truth about ourselves is where we find freedom. But it isn't necessarily easy, which is why when I first started to create margin in my life, and I thought it would be so easy that it wasn't. because my whole internal system was wired to protect myself from margin. It was my own demons within myself that wanted to be impressive to people. that wanted to myself that I was worthy, those types of things. So get some deep hard work. It's the best of work, but it's not necessarily the easiest of work.

James Early [00:42:23]:

Right. I just remembered a quote that I've heard. I I've just heard this, so I'm not sure if it's a 100% authentic. But I heard that Martin Luther, who started the Protestant Reformation, said at one point, if I don't spend 3 hours praying every day, I can't get anything done. Is that, have you heard that?

Tommy Thompson [00:42:43]:

Well, The version I heard is, he said "I spend 2 hours a day with God unless I have a really busy schedule in which I spend 4 hours with Him."

James Early [00:43:00]:

Okay. That's even better. I love it. The idea obviously is we need that time in the audience of one. Can I ask you how much time do you spend on average each day in your you know, in in the morning just with God, whether it's Bible study or journaling, all those things you're talking about?

Tommy Thompson [00:43:18]:

I typically will spend an hour and a half. Occasionally, very, very rarely spend less than an hour and sometimes it'll go to 2 hours. Hour and a half is a pretty good sweet spot for me. It allows me to go through those various pieces in an unrushed way. I find an hour. actually looking at the clock too much. So, you know, I put that out there, but that's something that I've grown into. over a lot of years. That's not necessarily what other people need to do. That's just me. What works for you? That's helpful for me. My wife probably spends more time than that each morning. And, you know, again, I'd like to suggest it's not at the expense of accomplishment. I don't think I've under accomplished you know, in terms of what I've done in life. And if I've under accomplished, I think it's because I haven't taken enough time.

James Early [00:44:24]:

Yeah. Yeah. How do you... okay, I'll speak for my own experience. Sometimes I'm sitting there in what I call my prayer chair. and I'm really connected. I really feel God's presence. I feel I'm in that audience of one. Other times, it seems just like words, and I can spend an hour and I don't feel like I've connected at all. For you, I don't know if you've ever had that experience, but is there something in your prayer time your Bible study that helps you, I'll say, get connected more quickly or more deeply instead of just sort of on the surface and you're just going over and it's you know, there's no inspiration there.

Tommy Thompson [00:45:06]:

Sure. There are, but I think I would say, first of all, before those things that that I might do to try to counter that, is that I think the importance is the daily practice of showing up and the practice of showing up. over years, over decades, has a compounding effect. to change us fundamentally from the inside out. And it's not so important or relevant Whether every day is this magical experience of intimacy with God. It's the daily practice of showing up and doing what we can to present ourselves before God and allow to happen what God allows to happen. So it's the showing up that I believe is the critical active obedience. And then what He chooses to do with that time is up to Him. Now that said, the practice that is very helpful to me is The very slow practice of meditating on Scripture and that slow practice of taking Small portions of Scripture and identifying something in that time in the slow reading that speaks to you and allowing yourself to meditate on that. My understanding of the word meditate in the Hebrew language is that it refers to a cow chewing its cud. Which is the experience of eating -- Oh. -- and

regurgitating and digesting and regurgitating. until the food becomes part of who that cow is. And that's the image of meditating, and I think that's the powerful practice that can help sometimes when we're just not there. It can help us center in. If we we're looking at Scripture each day saying, what's the one thing that God might be saying? Let me mull on that and digest it and think about. And even to do that, you know, in our prayer, a lot of times I'm very distracted in my prayer life. and my mind's wandering all over the place. And sometimes I'll just stop in that And I'll begin to recite very slowly the 23rd Psalm: The Lord is my shepherd. I have everything that I need. And as I slowly go through, I find myself kinda reengaging from the distraction that we fight so much.

James Early [00:48:07]:

Well, that's kinda what you're talking about earlier. When you're going too fast, you need to slow down. I love that idea of slowing down and actually thinking about each idea in there, breathing in the idea really. You said something interesting about the fact that over many decades, This has been a practice and everything. A lot of my listeners are, you know, young people, and they're kind of at the beginning of that journey. If you're listening here and you're liking your twenties or something, listen to what Tommy is saying here because this daily practice has an accumulative effect over many years it has for me as well. Sometimes younger people tend to get all. They wanna race out do everything, and they think they gotta do everything in a day. And it's important to realize this as you go forward in your life wherever you are in your life to take some of these ideas Tommy's been talking about. They apply at whatever stage you are in your life. I'm thinking about just Somehow this just came to me. I'm thinking about other places in the Bible where space was created. Do you remember when the disciples were getting raked over the coals by the Sanhedrin and Gamaliel, who was a revered teacher, said Okay. Let's put them outside. Let's give them space. Let's put them outside. Now let's talk about this. He was so instrumental in that moment. What a man of wisdom, but he was bringing space for the disciples, but he was also giving space to his fellow Sanhedrin members to think, okay. Let's not rush this. Let's think about what's going on here. We've been talking about how we can find space in our own lives, but what I'm just thinking about Gamaliel. He was bringing space to all those around him. He must have had that as a practice in his own life or he wouldn't have realized the need for that. I mean, I don't know. It wasn't there. but he was bringing space to that whole situation and it allowed it to diffuse the tension a little bit.

Tommy Thompson [00:50:19]:

Well, it's a great point because it really shows the breadth of this concept because think about the power that could come to so many people that they created more space for their families. the quality of family life that comes if we provide the leadership to create space around a dining room table, or space around some activity that we do. Think about how a small group can be so much more impactful if we create some space for people to share their concerns instead of just you know, making sure we get all of the Bible verses in that we want to talk about. Think about how many decisions are inadequately made because we don't take this space like Gamaliel did to discern and wait on the Lord. Think about the power of the concept throughout Scripture of waiting on the Lord. You know, that's creating space. It's everywhere when you begin to look with those eyes.

James Early [00:51:29]:

Yeah. So let's say you have created all this space and you've done all this and you're actually What do you do in that space? What do you do in the margins? What do you do? Where's your mind? Where's your heart in those spaces when you're not racing around that you've created?

Tommy Thompson [00:51:52]:

Well, to some degree, I mean, it's very simplistic, but you enjoy the space. You have the phrase in Psalms "God led me to a spacious place."

James Early [00:52:06]:

Yeah.

Tommy Thompson [00:52:07]:

And I think to some degree, we we've come to think that God doesn't want us to enjoy life. But you know, I think of the 23rd Psalm. He makes me lie down in green pasture. He leads me beside quiet waters. He restores my soul. You think about that I think God wants us to enjoy the fullness of nature, the fullness of space, and at times there doesn't have to be a purpose behind. So a lot of times in my best moments. I don't worry about it. God doesn't need me to do his work. He chooses to allow me to participate in it. Yeah. That's freedom. And I think it's freedom that God would desire for us to have.

James Early [00:53:03]:

That's a beautiful way to start to close down here. I want you to tell people quickly about your podcast. You've been doing it for a while. You stopped. You started again. Tell me where you're going with it. What are you trying to do with your podcast and how can people tune in to listen to it?

Tommy Thompson [00:53:21]:

Right. Thanks. I appreciate that. The podcast is Space for Life and this year as I've kind of reintroduced the podcast. I have it both as a YouTube channel, so audio and video, or you can find it on any of the normal podcast platform, Space for Life. And it's really along the lines of everything we've talked about. About half the episodes, I have a co-host and I'll do some teaching during it and it's designed to be very practical steps that we can take to live a more spacious, purposeful life and then the other half are Some guests that I have that are incredible people who are living amazing stories. And what I've found is often at the root of that is practices of the space that they've applied in their lives. And so It's just conversations that hopefully encourage all in very practical ways that how can we experience more life by creating space. And faith is certainly central to it, but my hope in it is to create a kind of conversation that's

accessible to anybody wherever they are in the faith journey while at the same time being very clear about what's at the center for me.

James Early [00:54:52]:

Yeah. Sure. Of course. That's great. Well, I've enjoyed listening to your show. You've got a wonderful spirit of sharing ideas and helping people. It's really beautiful to see. I wanna honor you, Tommy, just because of this we're talking about lifelong lessons that you've learned incrementally over the years, but you've really distilled it down to this Wonderful message in finding space, and you're helping people in so many different ways. I just really wanna honor you for that. Thank you. How can people connect with you?

Tommy Thompson [00:55:25]:

Well, certainly, the podcast is one form. I have a website real simple thomythompson.org. Some of the blogs that I have written over years in the podcast and some different tools that I have to try to help people figure out what to do with space, things like a whole life assessment and creating a future vision for your life. are on there. I have an Instagram account [@author_tommythompson](https://www.instagram.com/author_tommythompson) that I post to regularly, post some clips from the podcast and different things that I'm thinking about. So I'd love to have people engage. My big encouragement with the book for those who are brave enough would be to engage in in a conversation with a small group. because as we talk with one another, as we, in essence, confess how hard this is, we really find a path to putting these things into practice with the encouragement of brothers and sisters and with the encouragement of others I've found and heard from others that it's very accessible book for small groups to use.

James Early [00:56:36]:

Oh, I totally agree. When you just said that I realized that it would be a great for a book group, a book discussion, or small group too, because there's so many good questions. When somebody else shares their experience, you realize, oh, yeah. That applies to me. or You get another idea. So that's a great idea. Is there any final comment you like to make to some things up or maybe something I didn't ask that you'd like to bring out. Is there anything you wanna especially leave my listeners with?

Tommy Thompson [00:57:08]:

Yeah. One of the things that, and it's kind of foundational in the book that we didn't get into, and that's totally fine, but after about 20 years of trying to figure out this margin, we really encountered the big storm of life, and that was my daughter being diagnosed with cancer. And the point of bringing it up is not so much that. It's to realize that these practices of creating space is what equips us to deal with the storms of life. And I find that people when the storms come, and they do come, whether it's a relationship or a business or an illness, are ill equipped to deal with the storms because they haven't created that rich soil that we need in order to weather the storms. And it's by God's grace that he gave us 20 years head start to learn lessons that enabled

us to weather one of the hardest storms anybody can go through. And so Yeah. These lessons are for life, but at times these lessons are for survival in the real storms that will come in life.

James Early [00:58:32]:

Right. Wow, that's so powerful. Thank you for sharing that. I appreciate that. I've got 3 final questions that I ask all my guests. The first one is if you could talk to any Bible character other than Jesus, who would it be and what would you ask them?

Tommy Thompson [00:58:52]:

It is such a good question. I would love to talk to David. David, you know, is this amazing character, you know, king of Israel warrior, manly man, and yet he had this incredible balance of also being this creative author of the Psalms, passionate person after God's heart. And I'd love to just actually shadow him and see what it's like to live that breadth and fullness and passion in life that was both the Psalms and the warrior king.

James Early [00:59:36]:

So is there anything specifically? After you'd shadowed him a while, is there anything you would ask him? What would you what would you ask him?

Tommy Thompson [00:59:44]:

I would probably want to know what his morning time was like.

James Early [00:59:48]:

Okay.

Tommy Thompson [00:59:49]:

How does he engage that passion for God? That is so evident throughout the Psalms. Where are his practices and habits? I'd love to know that.

James Early [01:00:03]:

That's a great yeah. I'd like to know that too. Okay. Here's the second question. Is there any Bible character that you especially identify with?

Tommy Thompson [01:00:14]:

I would say maybe one that I aspire to might be a different way.

James Early [01:00:21]:

Okay.

Tommy Thompson [01:00:22]:

I love John. I love just his pure love that he had for Jesus. I love, I visualize the image, you know, many times in the last supper where it describes him just reclining on Jesus' chest. And I think, wow. That would just be such an amazing experience to be so free and full of love and not be always driving and grinding like I'm wired, I love as well, and I'm fired to be More like him and perhaps in a sense, less like Peter.

James Early [01:01:09]:

That's beautiful. So the third question is, The Bible Speaks to You Podcast is about getting back to the original Christianity of Jesus, not all the things we've added in the last 2,000 years, and embracing his mindset. How would you describe Jesus' original message of how he wanted us to live our lives?

Tommy Thompson [01:01:32]:

I believe that he came as it says in John 10 that he came to bring us light. and life to the full. It's just that I think we so dramatically distorted that message. and I think that light to the full is a life of deep relationship. It's a life of purpose. but it's also an unrushed life of joy and peace and *Kairos* moments as we talked about. He came to set us free. Yeah. And we so desperately need to be set free from her own driven-ness and our own speed and distraction and addictions and I think It's that message that, "I came to set you free from all these things that just bind you up and pull you down and overload you." And I think that's the that's the key, set the prisoners, and we're the prisoners, set the prisoners free.

James Early [01:02:38]:

Oh, wow. That is absolutely beautiful. Thank you so much. Tommy, it's been a pure delight to have you as a guest here on The Bible Speaks to You Podcast, I really appreciate you taking some time to spend with me. I loved all the things you've shared with my listeners. I'll have all the links to his website and his podcast and everything in the show notes so you can check that out. Tommy, thanks again for being here. I really appreciate it.

Tommy Thompson:

Well, thanks so much for having me. I really enjoyed our conversation.

James Early:

Alright. Take care.