

LOVE DEEPLY

LIVE QUIETLY

Four Rhythms for a Quiet Life

THE SPEED OF SOUL

in a World of Noise

HANDS

WORK WITH YOUR

MIND YOUR OWN AFFAIRS

TOMMY BROWN

What a handy and concise examination of the things that matter most. There's not a wasted word here. Brown has the wonderful ability to take something deep and profound and place it in a galvanizing framework. The Wisdom Circle he describes here is a simple way of grounding myself when life gets crazy. I will be returning to this treasure again and again, both within its pages and in my own mind and heart.

MARTY SOLOMON, creator of *The BEMA Podcast* and author of *Asking Better Questions of the Bible*

I've lived most of my life in a harried state of multitasking—such is the life of a busy working mom on a mission to follow Jesus. But like many of my peers, I'm tired. I often wonder if we can truly be as effective and fruitful as Jesus envisioned his followers to be when our tanks are empty and our attention is fractured.

Tommy's book *The Speed of Soul* is powerful because it's simple, direct, and incredibly practical. I'll be recommending it to every Christian I know.

KAT ARMSTRONG, Bible teacher, podcast host, and author of the *Storyline Bible Studies*

Pressured by life's demands and religious ambitions, we are always racing ahead of the Spirit, striving to get more, be better, and do great things for God. Thankfully, this book doesn't shout at us to slow down. It doesn't preach peace but shares it, drawing us back gently to the unhurried rhythms of grace. There are no quick solutions here, just the quiet wisdom of someone who's learned how good it is to keep pace with the "three-mile-an-hour God."

CHRIS E. W. GREEN, professor of public theology at Southeastern University in Lakeland, Florida, and bishop of the Diocese of St. Anthony (CEEC)

Tommy Brown's *The Speed of Soul* isn't a call to add one more practice to an already crowded schedule but an invitation to recalibrate the very shape of our lives around four simple, interlocking rhythms drawn from 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12. Having known Tommy for over twenty-five years, I can attest that this is sage wisdom from someone who isn't just writing a book but living these truths. His own steady center of gravity is a testament to the deep stillness and purpose he so generously teaches.

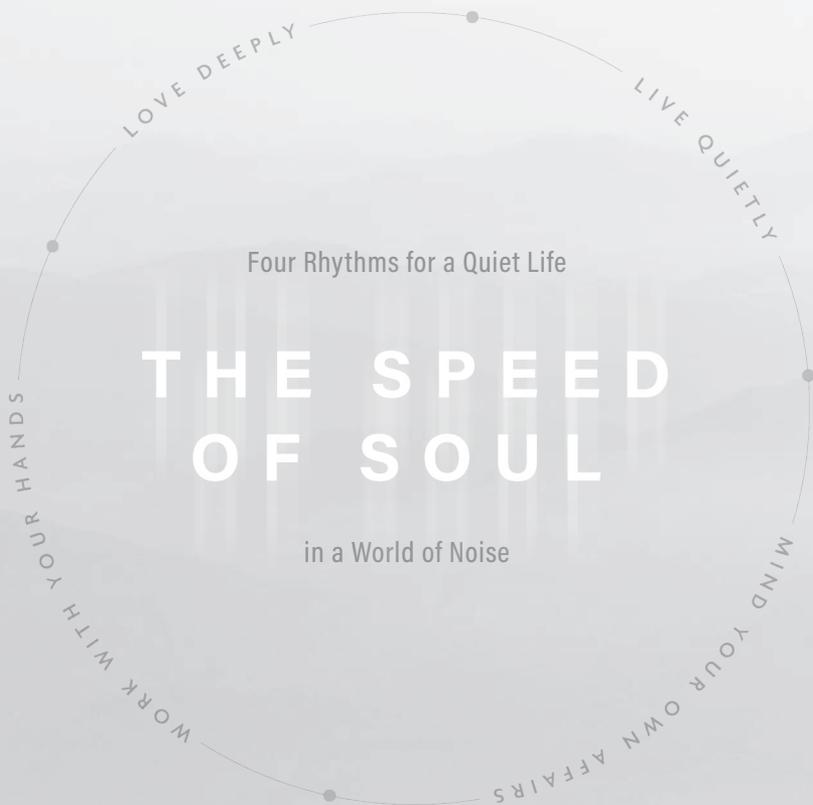
DR. JEREMY SIMS, professor of spiritual formation at Southeastern University

This book is for anyone who has ever found themselves overfunctioning. In a world full of hurry, Tommy's hard questions have a way of quieting the noise and drawing us back to center. He gets to the heart of the matter by digging deep into simple truths—truths that always seem to lead back to the ultimate Helper. Tommy, thank you for your relational investment in us and for courageously unpacking the stories we tell ourselves.

DEREK AND KATELYN DRYE, country duo the Dryes

Every chapter in *The Speed of Soul* flows against the cultural current to shepherd us, forward and free, into transformational inner examination. This book is a North Star guiding our hearts back home to holy reform and to the power and practicalities of Scripture as our true compass for lives of restored margin and meaning. If you're ready to step out of the frantic flow of a hectic and hurried life and into the wide-open, spacious clearing that is God's invitational rest, every page of this work is a trustworthy guide.

TANYA GODSEY, artist, speaker, spiritual director, and author of *Befriending God*



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FINDING CENTER

An Invitation to a Steadied Soul



“Pastor Tommy, you need to find your center.”

The elderly gentleman across the table from me was what I imagine when I think about a mature Christian: love, joy, peace, patience and all the rest¹ inside his cable-knit sweater-vest. I had asked him to lunch because I was floundering in my career and because he embodied the confidence, calm, and clarity that I desired. As he spoke about finding center, I wanted to nod and say that yes, yes, he was so right—but it was as obvious to him as to me that I, in my twenties at the time, had no clue what he meant.

“Listen,” he went on, “the whole time we’ve been at lunch, you’ve been telling me how stressed you are. You’re worried about what your coworkers think. You’re running around your church trying to stamp down every problem that pops up like you’re playing Whack-a-Mole. Your to-do list is longer than my

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arm. It's like you're standing in a field and there's a storm blowing through and you're just taking it square on the chin. You need to lower your center of gravity. You seem harried to me."

Harried—there's an odd word. You don't hear it much anymore, except from the old-timers. But it's a good word because when you say it, you feel it. And you know harried when you see it. I saw it three times this past week.

- A teenager holds her head in her hands and sobs, telling me how lonely and yet overwhelmed she feels. Meanwhile, her cell phone buzzes like a shock collar.
- A middle-aged woman receives a terminal diagnosis. Her husband stresses over how he's going to keep his job and hold together his family of four children.
- My wife and I compare calendars and realize that on Friday night our kids have three events at the same time. And we only have two children. And that's just Friday.

Harried is having more month than money, more commitments than calendar space, more stress than peace, more work than sleep, more and more and more. Always more. Harried makes you feel like if one more thing gets added to your plate, you're going to lose your mind and break the plate. Harried makes you snippy and snappy and otherwise crabby about little things that don't make a big difference.

And maybe the worst thing about harried is . . . it just happens.

Harried is the path of least resistance in a frenetic world.
You know what doesn't just happen?

Calm. Content. Clear. Focused. Grounded. Strong.
Spacious. Present.

In a word: centered.

Over the years, I've thought a lot about the elderly gentleman's words. Harried seemed inevitable—but centered? One doesn't just drift effortlessly into a centered life, one of internal stability and fortitude. An unharried life, I think, requires cultivating an unhurried soul.

One thing was clear: I couldn't find whatever my center was if I was taking the storm on the chin. It felt like that man knew something I didn't; something he'd learned in the school of hard knocks that everyone attends but few learn the lessons of.

As I remember his warm demeanor, I know he spoke from experience about finding his center—his presence wasn't feigned or forced; he had *become* something, had been forged into something good and beautiful and true. Like a river cutting through a canyon, wisdom coursed through this man's life, carving character into his core. And when I reflect on his graciousness and patience with me, I can't help but think that he was inviting me to yield the mountain of my hardened, resistant, striving will to the eternal flow of wisdom that had shaped his life.

I wish I'd asked him more questions during that meal. Instead, I just prattled on about another problem. I didn't know it then, but that would be our final lunch. Time passed;

we lost touch. But even though I didn't have ears to hear at the time, his words weren't lost on me. At the right moment, when the student was ready, the wisdom to find my center found me.



My son walked into my study as I read the Bible. He was curious and shocked to see that I had written in it, underlined sentences, colored passages—some in red, some in blue—drawn lines connecting one section to another, and doodled art in the margins. I think he was uneasy because he knows the Bible is a sacred book and marking it up must have seemed sacrilegious. I assured him that not only was this okay but also encouraged. This is a book that, yes, we read, but it is also one that we wrestle with, argue with, ask questions of. It's a book that, by its very design, offers myriad perspectives on God's mysterious ways.

The Bible is more than words on a page; it's also a canvas that invites us to color it with our experiences, to find ourselves within, between, and beyond the lines. I mark up my Bible because my Bible leaves its marks on my mind. I need space to work out what I think about it, and rather than keeping a journal handy to record notes, I imprint my impressions right there on the pages of Scripture. God's words, my words—a conversation.

Having used the same Bible for nearly twenty years, on occasion I'll encounter a note I have no memory of writing. Sometimes I'll read insights I've written that I no longer

agree with. And sometimes I stumble upon a thought I long ago jotted down that arrests my heart. This was the case one morning when I read:

Now concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another, for that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more, and to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.

1 THESSALONIANS 4:9-12

1. Love deeply.
2. Live quietly.
3. Mind your own affairs.
4. Work with your hands.

It's a simple list I forgot I'd written in the margin beside Paul's words. But more than that, it's a list that reminded me of that moment at the table with the elderly gentleman.

Although he was a Christian, the man never quoted anything from the Bible during our conversation. But this is what he was saying, or more accurately, what he embodied. It took me a decade to find language to describe what it means, as he put it, to *find your center and escape the harried life*. But here

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it is: As we love deeply, live quietly, mind our own affairs, and work with our hands, we create the conditions where our souls can flourish. We awaken to the life of God in us and the activity of God around us. We sink into the calm that comes from abiding in God's presence. We live from a center that holds and nourishes us. In a frenetic world filled with noise, these practices cultivate a quiet life that sustains the soul's natural rhythm—the speed of soul.

This soul-level quiet is who he was and *how* he was. This is what I hoped to become. However, at the time, I didn't have words (much less a *doable* description) to express my aspirations. But right here in my Bible's margins, though I'd had no clue what I was doing at the time, I'd left myself breadcrumbs that would lead me down a path toward steadying my soul.

My comments were written as a list in the blank spaces of my Bible. But when I read these words afresh, I saw them as though they were inside a circle. It's not that I circled them in my Bible; rather, the visual image that leapt from the page as I read the words was of them encompassed in a circle—like my mental camera was zooming in on them slowly: love deeply, live quietly, mind your own affairs, work with your hands.

So I grabbed my journal, because I needed more space than my Bible's margins allowed, and drew what I was seeing—these four phrases within a circle. Something about them being in a circle resonated with me, so I kept illustrating what I sensed about them. I suppose I could have sketched them inside a square or a triangle, rectangle, or octagon—they all have centers. But a circle seemed right.

Finding Center

Maybe a circle felt appropriate to me because when I think about a centered life, I see a circle: unbroken, without beginning or end, a steady boundary around a solid center. The ancients even described God as being like a circle whose center was everywhere and whose circumference was nowhere.²

Circles surround. Circles protect. Circles enclose within themselves what you want to focus on. Circles are elegant—smooth, curved lines in a world of jarring stops.

Circles are simple. I need simple.

Life is complex, and complexity wears me out. When I think about finding my center, I think about settling into a quiet haven—a shelter from life's harsh winds. I think about sinking from the edges of a circle to the center. I think about moving from life's extremes, where distractions and stresses abound, to the heart of things, where focus, clarity, and calm reside.

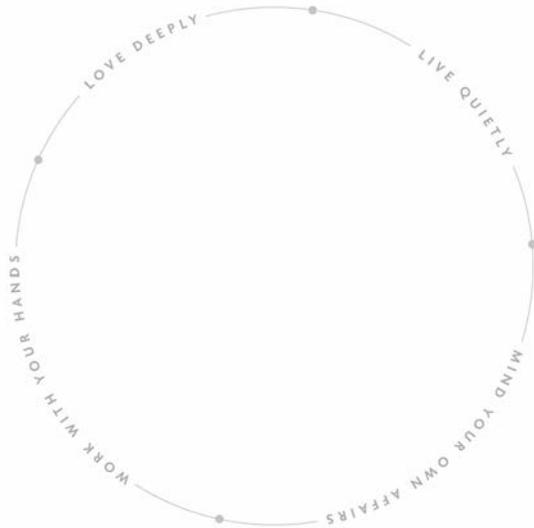
Perhaps you rarely feel centered. Challenges pummel from every direction. Something constantly demands attention. Priorities compete. Problems need solving. Work frustrates. Relationships get strained. Even good things—when too many of them tug on your immediate attention—can wear you down.

Steadying our souls requires focus: stepping back from the chaos, living from a deep well of wisdom that strengthens and guides us. Focus, perhaps, like a circle provides. A circle helps us simplify and clarify what's important. A circle creates boundaries and structure for our lives and attention.

That's why I've started calling 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12 *the Wisdom Circle*. These verses draw me in to focus on what matters most. The Wisdom Circle helps me have energy to do

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the things that I know God is calling me to do, to possess the resilience to be who he calls me to be, and to love the people he brings into my circle in the ways they deserve. A circle's perimeter helps guard me like a wall, keeping me close to the practices, priorities, and people in life that matter most. A circle provides a buffer from seductions that lure me back into that field where I take the winds head on, while I am opened up inside to engage the world in a healthy and centered way. It shows me an elegant, simple structure that supports spiritual vitality.³ I think the Wisdom Circle can do the same for you.



Do you long for life-giving, stable, affirming relationships?

Love deeply.

Do you wish your life weren't so hectic and loud?

Live quietly.

Finding Center

Do you feel exhausted from managing your family's dysfunction and friends' complaints?

Mind your own affairs.

Do you long to make something meaningful and creative out of your life, something that makes a difference?

Work with your hands.

At our center, we all want the same things. To live the abundant life that Jesus promised. To embody wisdom like that which the elderly gentleman exuded. To feel secure and connected in our relationships. To walk with calm, contentment, and confidence. To make a difference in the world. We want what the apostle Paul offered the Thessalonian church—lives that please God and are attractive to onlookers. What more could be hoped for?

The path to that kind of life isn't easy, but it is simple.

The Wisdom Circle shows us the way.

Reflection and Discussion



1. What does the word *harried* describe in your life?
2. Of the four things Paul prescribes—loving deeply, living quietly, minding your own affairs, and working with your hands—which one comes most naturally to you? Least naturally? Why?
3. Who in your life seems centered, as though living from a soul-level quiet place? What impact do you notice that this person has on their environment and in their relationships?
4. Why did you pick up this book? In other words, what are you seeking?