

Coffee with Phil. 27. The Power of Silence

Introduction

Well, hi and welcome to the podcast. Welcome to coffee with Phil. My name's Phil Strong and this afternoon I have just enjoyed what I call a piccolo latte. It's a double shot of espresso with not as much milk as you find in the flat white. Friends of mine, Andrew and Rochelle, they order these all the time, but, the way they order their coffee is espresso with hot milk in a jug on the side that allows them to control how much milk they have blended into their espresso. It's not a bad way to drink coffee. Piccolo latte is obviously less milk, so it has the benefits of less of that going around inside your stomach, but you get that goodness of the espresso anyway. Can you tell I like my coffee?

Welcome to the podcast. Welcome to Coffee with Phil, for another conversation where I share a bit of my life with you, and this one's going to be interesting. You can see by the title, today I'm speaking about the power of silence, and no, I'm not going to be silent. I'm going to talk to you, but I'm gonna talk to you about the power of silence. I'm gonna also talk to you about the problems that we experience as human beings and me particularly. But then I'm actually gonna talk to you about the real problem, the actual problem, the one that we don't admit or might not think about, and then I'm going to talk to you about how to correct it, how I'm going to correct my error. I'm inviting you into that, that you might consider how that affects you and how you might do it for yourself.

So welcome to the podcast. I am delighted to spend time with you, and as always I hope you're enjoying these episodes. I'm trying to keep them short so that you can punch them out easy, but I also want you to contemplate or be challenged by it. I spoke at a business evening recently on behalf of a friend of mine, she invited me in to speak to a whole lot of business people and part of her introduction, she said Phil was one of those guys that when you listen to him speak, it usually costs you a couple of hours sleep at night, and I took that as a compliment, because I like to provoke and I like to challenge. So may you be provoked, and I'm sure I'm gonna finish with a challenge for you today.

The problem with too much noise

Hey, let me start by saying, do you have loud noises in your head? Do you have too many noises in your head? Is your head busy, constantly rushing? Are you like, you know that image of a hamster spinning on that wheel inside its cage, constantly going but getting nowhere. You know, sometimes I just feel like that's what my brain is like. I'm a thinker. I'm an overthinker, and to be honest with you, sometimes when I've got too much going on, I'm struggling to sleep because I turn over and a thought pops into my head, and oh, that's it, I'm done. I'm done because I'm now thinking about the issue that has arrived in my head, and it's noise, it's noise.

But here's what caused problems for me, because that noise, or the thinking, the overthinking that noise, created an overload on my internal world, so I'm going to talk to you today about your soul. Your soul, my soul, is the mix up and the makeup of our will, our emotion, and our mind. So, our brain thinks, our will controls what we think, but our emotions are driven by and fed by that, and then they circle back into what we think about.

So, if you think about anxiety, for instance, your mind is struggling to cope with something, you've got unanswered questions, or you've got pressures, you've got issues that you're worried about, and that causes your body to react with the chemical imbalance that causes anxiety, and it's your emotions that are heightened, you're sensitive, you're upset, you're angry, you're fearful, which then drives your actions, because your brain then is driven to dwell on these things.

So, here's the problem, is, when my brain is busy, when my mind is overloaded, my soul becomes overloaded. My mind, my will, and my emotions become overloaded. Now what that means is, what I've been learning, is that my internal world is unable to handle my external world, my inner world, my mind, my will, and my emotions, my soul, does not have the capacity to handle what's going on around me in my external world.

And I remember Kathy and I were having a conversation recently. And look, I promised I'll be honest with you, so I will. It was about our flipping dog. She wasn't sleeping. She was crying all night after we moved into our house, and that just meant we got no sleep for like 3 weeks, and I was frazzled, man. But the point of me telling you that was something was going on, I can't even remember what it was, but we're driving in the car and I just said to Kathy, I reacted to something, I said look, I just don't have the capacity to deal with this in a healthy way right now, and that's why I'm yelling, or it's why I'm, that's why I'm angry, it's why I'm upset, and I'm sorry, I'm not taking it out on you, but I've just got nothing in me that can cope with this, and that's what it means to have your soul so overloaded that your internal world can't handle your external world.

And so this is why one of the reasons why I'm going on a journey with a few other people to discover how to, and to attempt to implement what's called a slowed down spirituality, and I've referred to Peter Scazzero before, there's others, Thomas Merton and John Mark Comer, a whole bunch of guys that I'm listening to right now that are helping me to discover the benefits of a slowed down spirituality. I'm choosing to do that in community. I'm choosing to do it with other people, so we can have shared learning. We can have shared experiences, and we can have shared accountability.

But one of the things that I wanted to talk about today was the power of silence, because silence is a key to a slowed down spirituality. Now for those of you that might be wondering what I mean by a slowed down spirituality, from a Christian context, which is where I have my worldview set, spirituality means my relationship, my personal relationship with God. I have a personal, dynamic, intimate relationship with the God who created me, and called me to walk in friendship with him. That's what I mean by spirituality. Now I'm trying to slow that down, I'm trying to slow down what's happening around me, and silence is a key to that.

Well, what I wanna do first is I wanna talk about the problem with too much noise, and I've been on a journey in this, so I'm gonna share from my perspective. But perhaps you could use my testimony as a mirror to hold up, so that you can look at yourself.

You know what I discovered? That we human beings are over stimulated with media. I've got four devices around me right now, all projecting content at me, and then if I jump on social media while I'm waiting for the jug to boil, I have thousands of messages sent to me, including what people I don't really care about are having for breakfast.

Did you know in 2022, so, post lockdown season, 2022, just recently there was a survey done on adults across America, that adults were spending greater than 13 hours a day on devices. 13 hours worth of content, noise, running through their eyeballs, so that their brain was over stimulated, so over stimulation is the issue.

Secondly, so the first problem is you've got too much media going on, so stop it, and you know I'm really trying to police what influence my devices have on my life. Secondly, we think we need to know everything. Now this is a modern problem, because if you think about, say, 200 years ago, you lived in a village, and you knew what was happening in the village. Maybe there was 50 people, maybe it was 100 people, if you lived in a big village. But you had no idea what was happening in the Big city. You very likely had no idea what was happening in another country, and you didn't care, because your world was all that mattered to you, and your world was what you could see around you.

But now, because the invention of newspapers, and radio, and television, and now the Internet, we can access information on a worldwide scale instantly, and we think we need to know it all, we consume this content about what's happening in every country, that doesn't even affect our lives, and this builds anxiety in us. I read a book over the summer titled 'Non Anxious Presence' by a Guy in Australia, old Mark Sayer, we'll put a link to it in the show notes for you.

But he was sharing with us on a quite a complicated, and detailed, and an academic level, just how this overstimulation of news that doesn't relate to us creates anxiety inside of us, and anxiety is one of those emotions that has a cyclical effect on our body and our mind. And the emotion takes over now, emotions aren't bad, but unhealthy emotions are, and so we think we need to know everything that's happening, and it's the problem that creates too much noise, which means our internal world is stuffed, and so I'm trying to shut that out.

The third issue with too much noise. Before I get on to the real issue, let me just tease you with that. The third issue I wanted to talk about is we think we need answers to all of our questions, and I'm going to do a podcast on this, I've got it on my list to speak to you about soon, because I've learned the hard way that I just have to give up my right to know everything all of the time.

We think we need to have all our questions answered so that we can have this false perception that we're in control of our world. Which essentially means we would want to be God, and not trust God that he knows the answers to our unanswered questions. So we create this drive within us to control what happens by searching for answers, and it's a false reality. But, because we can never achieve that it creates a tension inside of us, that means we've got too much noise in our head through unanswered questions, which means we can't find the solitude and the peace that we actually desire.

So the problem with too much noise is we're overstimulated by media, we think we need to know everything, and we think we need answers to everything. But did you know that's actually not the worst problem for me. Do you want to know what the real problem is? The actual problem? Like if I scrape back and put aside those things? Which are all true, but they're not the root cause of the problem.

The actual real problem with too much noise

I want to read to you a quote from a long-term minister, his name is Leighton Ford, and when I was looking at him this afternoon online very briefly, I discovered that at 90 years old, he's decided it's time to mentor other Christian leaders. So, much respect to him. Listen to this. He talks about busyness first

of all, and I wanted to find it, because the quote is somewhat complicated. He says that 'when I'm busy I am demonstrating a blasphemous anxiety to do God's work for him', so me being busy is me blaspheming, which means speaking irreverently about God. I have an anxiety that's driven by my desire to do God's work for him. But this is what Doctor Leighton Ford says, he says 'when I am still the compulsion to be busy gives way to compunction', it's an interesting word, you might want to check the transcript for this, 'When I am still compulsion to be busy, gives way to compunction', which means to be pricked or punctured. 'That is', he says, 'God can break through many layers with which I protect myself. So that I can hear his word and be poised to listen. In perpetual motion. I can mistake the flow of my adrenaline for the moving of the Holy Spirit'. Oh my gosh, when I read that I was like, that just describes me. But you know I'm, I've got a lot going on, and I've got the wheels turning pretty quickly, and listen to this 'in my perpetual motion, I mistake the flow of my adrenaline for the moving of the Holy Spirit. I can look live in the illusion that I'm ultimately in control of my destiny and my daily affairs'. So, when I'm busy, adrenaline flows, when I'm flowing with adrenaline, I think way God's working through me, but I'm mistaken because I'm in the illusion that I'm in control of my destiny.

He concludes with this 'French philosopher and mathematician Blaise Pascal observed that 'most of our human problems come because we don't know how to sit still in our room for an hour'. We need to be still before the Lord that we would know that he is the Lord'. There's my quote for you.

When I read that quote, look, I would suggest you would do well to go back to the transcript and find that quote so that you can process it word by word, line by line and really ask God to speak to you through it. But what I've discovered is that a noise that and I draw around me through my issues, my overstimulation, my need to know everything, and my need to have answers, my getting busy so that I avoid God, I drown up the still small voice of God, and what I'm learning is that God doesn't shout, he doesn't shout over the noise of my life, he whispers, and he waits for me to turn my attention to the still small voice of the Lord.

I've been reading about Elijah recently, and I'm just, I'm relating to Elijah, because he was a man full of fire and passion for God, but he struggled with what was happening around him, and we see Elijah have this amazing contest on Mount Carmel, and the prophets of Baal are destroyed as fire falls from heaven, and as evidence of God being the one true God, prophets of Baal are killed as a result of that, and then he flees, and he has a moment on the mountain, he's on Mount Horeb, and you can read that story in 1 Kings 19, let me just read it to you, so, God's talking to Elijah on this mountain here, and God says to Elijah, 'go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, and behold, the Lord passed by in a great, strong wind, tore into the mountain, and broke the rock into pieces, but the Lord was not in the wind, and after the wind was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake, and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire, and after the fire, a still small voice, so it was when Elijah heard it that he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave, suddenly a voice came to him'.

I looked into what Mount Horeb was, it's interchanged with the name Mount Sinai, which you may recognise a little more easily. It's the place of encounter. It's the place where Moses encountered God in a burning bush. It's the place where Moses climbed the mountain to receive the 10 Commandments, and he spoke with the Lord as a man would speak face to face with a friend. Deuteronomy 5:2 says that Mount Horeb was the place where God made covenant with man.

What's the point here? The real problem is that we want the noise. We want the noisy wind, we want the earthquake, we want the fire. Our lives are full of hot air, a shaking and heat. But the Lord is not in any of it, and after that we find the still small voice of God. This challenges me aye. You know, I've seen God move in powerful ways recently in church meetings and leadership meetings, and in my own quiet time, and it's in the stillness and the quiet that I sense God moving.

The Power of Silence

So, I want to talk to you just briefly here about the power of silence, and I would suggest to you that you could take leadership as I am doing, from what David would say, and look, the Psalms are a great reference for this, he says in Psalm 42 'Why are you cast down? Oh, my soul. Why are you disquieted? Be within me, hope in God, he says to himself, for I shall yet praise him for the help of my countenance.' And down in verse 11, 'why are you cast down oh my soul? And why are you this way within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise him. The help of my countenance and my God', he's saying to himself that he needs to shut things down inside him to command his soul to be still, and to seek God, and I find this really challenging. You know, like, I have this phrase that I use, and I even know that I really fully understand it, but I need to command my soul to be still before God.

I don't know if you're someone that has a quiet time. I don't know if you're someone that seeks God deliberately and intentionally each day. If you're not, I would encourage you to do so, and you might say, I don't have time, well, piffle on you, you're never gonna find God in the noise of your life. But you gotta train yourself. You gotta train yourself. You gotta carve it out. You've gotta be intentional, and I wanna speak about that shortly. But David writes this in Psalm 103 'Bless the Lord, Oh my soul.' He commands his soul, 'you will bless the Lord and all that was within me will bless his holy name, bless the Lord,' he says in verse two 'Oh my soul, and forget not all his benefits. Who forgives my iniquities. Who heals my diseases. Who redeems my life from destruction. Who crowns me with loving kindness and tender mercies.' He's just reminding himself of all those things that God does for him, because he says 'I must bless the Lord, I must worship the Lord. Everything within me should bless his holy name.'

So, what I'm trying to do is train myself. I'm trying to discipline myself, you know Paul writes in one of his letters. Oh, my gosh, I forget which one it is now. But he says, you must train yourself like an athlete trains to win the prize, and so, training yourself is the key here. I think you should do this. No, let me say this. I think I should do this. This is what I'm trying to do, in my journey to find a slow down spirituality. I'm trying to train myself to be still, and I sit there, not to read, not to talk, not to think, and I'm trying to train my mind to be still before the Lord, be still before the Lord, and that I would know he is God, and I'm trying to learn how to do that, because it's really difficult to shut my mind down.

But I'm having to train myself, so you know when you learned to ride a bike, the first time you hopped on it you probably didn't do so well, but then as you got more experience on how to handle the wobbles you became more confident, you came faster. That's what you've gotta do when learning to be still, you've just gotta deal with the wobbles, the distractions, and your mind wandering, and you've got to command your soul to focus on the Lord. I like to imagine myself sitting on a bench or on a, actually there's a picture I've got, it's a long pier on a lake, and I'm sitting on the end of it with Jesus beside me, and that helps me to get my attention on him and to stop the distractions.

So, I'm trying to train myself to be still, and I'm also training myself to be silent. One of the things that when you've been with someone for so long, Kathy and I have been married for 27 years this year, and

so we've spent a lot of time together, and we're really comfortable with silence and I think that's what Jesus wants. He wants you to be so comfortable in his presence that you're comfortable with the silence. That you can just sit there and know that you're sitting beside him and you don't have to yell at him. You don't have to cry. You don't have to whine. You don't have to ask. You just have to be with him, and I find, I'm finding it difficult, but I'm finding huge benefit in finding that silence.

But what I'm having to do, and this is the last thing, is I'm having to ask the Lord to help me to empty my mind, because, you know, at the beginning of the day, I've got a lot that I'm thinking about that's coming up, and I need to put it aside. I need to cast away my concerns, and cast my anxieties before God that he would take them that they would no longer be my burden, and as a result of that I can be still before the Lord and not be overstimulated by my racing mind, that means I've got a rushing wind, earthquake, or a fire, so that I miss the still small voice of God.

You know what I'm finding is confession is helping. So, I'm confessing my weaknesses. I mean, God, I'm I'm no good at this. I'm not practised at it. I'm trying to be better, but I confess before you that I am weak, and you are what I need. I choose to repent of my need to control, my personal drive to be busy, and I give up my right in repentance to have to know everything, and I thank you God that you're choosing to help me in this place, and I receive as your son, I receive your assistance.

And look, you might want to replay that prayer and perhaps write it down or get it out of the transcription, because I think it might help you. It's certainly what's helping me at the moment.

Challenges

So, finally I want to, it's very quickly, give you some challenges to do that might help you because this is what I'm doing. One I'm trying to reduce my media, so, get off your phone, get off your device, stop scrolling incessantly on social media, or watching dumb TikTok videos. Get off the media. The other thing that I'm doing is I'm meditating on a single Bible verse, just one, just one, and you know what, if you do that before you go to bed, that's actually what you fill your mind with as you go to sleep, and the Holy Spirit works with it.

So, just don't read a passage, read a verse, find a verse, and ask the Lord to speak to you through it. The other thing that I'm doing as part of this accountability group that I'm in, is we're carving out two minutes for solitude and silence. So, do you know how hard it is to sit in a chair and be silent before the Lord for two minutes? But I'm practising it, but I'm putting the appointment in my calendar. I'm choosing to do it on purpose. It's like, Jesus, you're so important to me that I'm going to make this happen before I get distracted by the business of my day and all the people that want my time. And finally, I'm accepting that it's difficult and I'm going to do it anyway. I'm looking to discipline myself and train myself like an athlete would, in order that I would find a new behaviour in the power of silence that would help me to connect with the Lord in a more deeper way.

So truly, my prayer for you, as I close I want to pray. Lord, would you help these ones who are listening, would you help them to find you in the noise and the chaos of their lives? Would you help them to have the fortitude to put aside chaos and to search for you? And I bless them with a fellowship of the Holy Spirit. Amen.