

A Reflection Guide for "Run Towards Pain? The Key to Influence with Global Leadership Expert Tommy Spaulding"

INTRODUCTION

In this honest episode of Making Sense of Faith, Adam Hamilton and Tommy Spaulding explore what it truly means to lead like Jesus. Through vulnerable stories about forgiveness struggles and the profound reality that we influence 80,000 people in our lifetime, this conversation challenges us to reconsider what success looks like and how we show up for others. Use this guide to reflect on your own leadership journey and discover practical ways to live with greater purpose and impact.

3 REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Take a moment to consider what resonated most deeply with you from this conversation:

1. Tommy mentions that we influence 2.8 people per day, totaling 80,000 people in our lifetime. If all these people gathered in your "stadium" at the end of your life, what do you think the sound would be - cheering, booing, or silence? What might you need to change to ensure it's a standing ovation?
2. Think about the difference between running toward celebration (birthday cards, congratulations) versus running toward pain (divorce, loss, depression). Reflect on a time when someone showed up for you during a difficult moment. How did that impact you, and who in your life right now might need you to "run toward their pain"?
3. Tommy honestly shares his list of "35 people" he needs to forgive, from childhood teachers to more serious wounds. What would your own "forgiveness audit" reveal? Who comes to mind when you think about people you're still carrying resentment toward?

2 KEY INSIGHTS

1. True Leadership Begins With "It's Not About You"

"If I could just drill that in every leader's head... It's not about you. It's not about you. It's not about you. It's not about you."

Question: What might change in your relationships, work, or family life if you truly embraced the principle that "it's not about you"?

Reflection: Tommy explains that 90% of leaders are "self-serving leaders" who put themselves first, then serve others after their own cup is filled. Only 10% are truly "heart-led leaders" who put others before themselves. Jesus modeled this perfectly when he washed his disciples' feet. Consider the areas of your life where you might be operating as a self-serving leader rather than a servant leader.

2. Forgiveness Is Essential for Authentic Relationships

"If you wanna build authentic, genuine, heartfelt, lifelong relationships... You really can't unless you forgive. Because every one of those people will hurt you at some point."

Question: How might your closest relationships change if you truly applied the principle that "love keeps no record of wrongs"?

Reflection: Both Adam and Tommy acknowledge that forgiveness is one of the hardest things we do as humans. Yet without it, we carry around a "backpack filled with rocks" that weighs us down and prevents us from building the deep, authentic relationships we all crave. Forgiveness doesn't mean what someone did was okay - it means choosing to release our right to hold it against them.

1 PRACTICE EXERCISE

The Stadium Visualization

Find a quiet space and take 10 minutes for this exercise:

1. Close your eyes and take several deep breaths
2. Imagine yourself walking onto the 50-yard line of a packed stadium with 80,000 people - everyone you've ever met or influenced in your life
3. Look around at the faces. Some you'll recognize, others you won't - the barista from last week, the neighbor you smiled at, the coworker you encouraged, the person you cut off in traffic
4. Listen to the sound. Are they cheering? Silent? What would you want them to be saying about how you impacted their life?
5. Choose one specific person currently in your life who could use you to "run toward their pain" - someone going through difficulty who needs support
6. Before you open your eyes, commit to one specific action you'll take this week to show up for that person
7. Write down their name and your commitment. Put it somewhere you'll see it daily

Remember: You influence 2.8 people every single day. Each interaction is an opportunity to fill someone's stadium with gratitude rather than regret.

QUOTES TO CONSIDER

"We run towards good, like fun things and celebrations, but we have a hard time running towards pain when your friend's going through a nasty divorce, when your friend's got a son that's hooked on drugs or depressed and suicidal."

"Stop sending Christmas cards and birthday cards and saying happy anniversary and congratulations to people. Show up to people when they have the hardship."

"We're called to love and serve all people... The best way to bring people to Jesus isn't to talk about Jesus. It's to model Jesus."

CLOSING REFLECTION

Leadership that truly matters isn't about titles, authority, or even success as the world defines it. It's about choosing, moment by moment, to put others first and to show up when it's inconvenient or uncomfortable. As you move forward from this reflection, remember that every single day you have 2.8 opportunities to make someone's life a little better. The question isn't whether you have influence - you do. The question is what you'll do with it.

This reflection guide was created to accompany the Making Sense of Faith podcast episode with Tommy Spalding. For more resources like this, visit makingsenseoffaith.com.