

ENCOURAGEMENT | *Being Present In Absence*

Well friends here we are once again in a season of not being able to be together and present with one another quite like we want – maybe even need. In Ontario at least, we've entered a zone of limitations on our gathering and just general community life – in church, and beyond. And it has us asking the question: how does this impact our spiritual practices of loving one another well? How do we be present in absence? Is that even possible?! How can we help carry each other's hearts, when I can't be in the room with you? We think it's still completely possible, and actually more essential right now than ever. So for these next few minutes we're going to experiment with how to be present in absence.

Start by grabbing a piece of paper and a pen (pause the video if you need) and we're going to make a quick list of the people in our lives who we would normally have *some* physical togetherness with, but – for whatever reason – right now we can't. Could be friends, family, coworkers, church community... but what about even more on the periphery of your life – babysitters, store clerks or restaurant staff. Also consider: who in your world was already suffering from an inordinate amount of loneliness and isolation, before anything changed? Who are your people? Make as exhaustive a list as you can in 30 seconds, just jot down every name that comes to you.

Ok now this list you've started is going to play into the week ahead with our daily practices, if you subscribe to those. But for right now I'm going to give you another minute to reflect – more slowly and prayerfully now – and try to centre down on just one name from that list. Who do you think could most benefit from a little extra encouragement right now? Who do you want to focus on?

The spiritual practice of encouragement is really simple, and really powerful. It's the simple art of noticing and naming that which is good, in and to a person. And like the term suggests, it's powerful in its ability to **put courage in** to a person. It's a very real gift we can give one another – being seen for who we are, and reminded of the goodness within us – at times when we're prone to lose sight of it. It can knit our hearts together, reminding us that we are not alone, that we're connected to and valued by a strong community of love. It's a way of being present even when we're absent. And we all need that right now.

So let's give it a shot. It doesn't need to be some big long eloquent novel of profound life changing revelation. Just let it be simple. The power is in the honesty of it, not the poetry of it. In fact, I'd say try to come up with just ONE single sentence. Just a tiny note of encouragement to say "I see you, and I think you're awesome because..."

It could be something you **admire** in them; where you see them **soaring**; maybe where you see them **struggling** but want them to know they're not alone. Maybe it's a simple: you just make me **smile**. Maybe it's something **deeper**. You pick the words. Just make them true. And put it into one sentence.

Ok now that you've practiced once, let's do take 2. Pick another name, and write one sentence for them.

You can guess what I'm going to say next: now find the time to send those sentences over to those people. Maybe you've texted it already, maybe it's a phone call you want to make later this afternoon.

Maybe it's a card to drop off at a restaurant or store. Just make sure you find some way to actually do it. And I know that for some of us – that vulnerable act requires its own courage muscles! But I promise you'll grow courage and love both in them and you when you do it.

Actively practicing encouragement is one way we can help to grow and replicate the heart of Christ among us – even in this season of a little more absence than presence. I'd even encourage you to consider making a daily practice of this one sentence thing. Throw them out everywhere! The world needs it.

AND if you haven't yet subscribed to our daily Spiritual Practice notifications in the App or downloaded the Practice This Week doc from the button below the video player – I'd strongly encourage you to consider doing that today, as all of our daily practices this week will be geared towards how to creatively be present even in absence this week.