

QC0069 - The Present of Presence

What is the greatest present you can give someone? Many people would say that love is the greatest present you can give someone. And that's hard to argue with, but what if there's a present that's more instrumental than love?

The Greatest Present You Can Give.

Today, we're going to look at what I believe is one of the greatest presents you can give someone. And believe it or not...it's not love.

Love is such a universal need, it's hard to imagine there would be a present greater than love. Even the New Testament Scriptures says that love for both God and others is the greatest commandment.

But, there's another present you can give that is even more important than the present of love...because without it, love wouldn't be possible.

What is this present? It's the present of presence.

Without your presence, you cannot listen to someone, care for someone, encourage, someone...in short...without your presence you cannot love someone.

What is Presence?

As you probably guessed, presence is more than just being there physically.

- A husband can be in the same room with his wife, but if he's absorbed in a game on TV while she's trying to talk to him...he's not really present.
- A dad can be in the stands at his daughters soccer game, but if he spends most of the time answering email on his phone...he's not really present.
- You can sit with a friend who's hurting, but if you keep glancing at your watch because you're bored or want to be somewhere else...you're not really present.

Presence involves focus and engagement. When you're present with someone, you have tunnel vision that shuts out everything but that person and what they're saying and feeling. To be present for someone means that you're there for them and nothing or no one else.

Why is Presence so Important?

If you've ever been with someone who was truly present with you, you know what a big deal it is. When someone gives you their full presence, you feel like they're truly interested in you as a person. They make you feel important and valued.

This is a powerful and much needed feeling in these days when so many things can make you feel unseen, unheard, and uncared for.

If you want to impact people in a powerful way, give them the gift of your full presence.

What Get's in the Way of Presence?

You may think, "No sweat. I can do that. I can be present." But being fully present is harder than it looks. Especially if you're a person who is a bit ADHD and always on the go.

There are two big things that can get in the way of us being truly present with someone.

The first is **distraction**. Minute by minute, we are bombarded with things trying to get our attention. Texts, emails and Facebook notifications flash and ding at us. Telemarketers call. Kids call our name. There's laundry in the hamper, to-do lists hanging on the fridge, and things that need fixed around the house.

Distraction is no longer the occasional thing. Distraction is now the constant stream of life. And all of this distraction makes truly being present with someone seem more like wishful thinking than a realistic possibility.

But for you and I to really be present with others, we will have to do battle with and defeat the myriad of distractions vying for our attention.

The second thing that can get in the way of us being truly present with someone is **impatience**. Being present takes time and a much slower pace than we're used to. You can't rush relationships...especially if one person in the relationship is hurting or in need.

When you encounter someone who needs your presences, take a deep breath, decide to clear a space in the midst of your distractions, and move your presence with that person to the top of the priority list.

How can you Really be Present?

Even if you're not good at giving someone the present of your presences, it is something you can get better at. In order to get better at truly being present, try working on the following until they become habits...

Slow down.

This may be the hardest of all the habits you need to develop. If you're like most people, you spend your day at full speed, trying to get everything done on your to-do list.

Slowing down in order to just sit and be present with someone can feel like a luxury you don't have time for. But think about how you felt the last time someone stopped, put down what they were doing, and took the time to listen to you. Didn't that make you feel valued and cared for?

Someone once said, "People don't remember what you say or do. They remember how you made them feel."

Look them in the eye.

If you tend to be easily distracted (like me), then work on keeping eye contact with the person. I have a friend who used to say, "I need you to listen to me with your face." Facing the person and looking in their eyes will not only communicate to them that they're important to you, it will help you cut out other things that might distract you from being fully present.

This is why, when my wife and I go out to eat, I need to sit facing away from the door and any TVs that might be in the room. This makes it easier to focus on just my wife.

Listen beyond the words.

Studies have shown that only about 30% of what a person is trying to communicate comes through their words. The rest comes through things like: facial expressions, body language, and sound of voice.

As you're listening to them, ask yourself, "What are they concerned about? How important is this to them? What are they not saying?" Etc.

This is a part of something called "active listening," and it's a lot of work. But it will help you be truly present with someone.

Empathize.

Empathy is a lot like listening beyond the words. When you empathize with someone, you're trying to put yourself in their shoes. You're asking yourself things like, "What are they feeling? Why would they be feeling that? What would I be feeling if I were them?"

Empathy helps you move beyond just the facts of what are being said, and instead get down to the heart of what's being said.

Ask questions.

Asking questions is a great way to show you're really interested and listening. You can ask questions:

- When you're unsure of something that was said and you need clarification.
- When you feel something was left out or you need more information to understand.
- When you want to prompt them to finish a thought or continue what they were saying.

Be careful not to inundate them with a lot of questions, but questions are a good way to keep them and you engaged.

Give support and encouragement...not answers.

So many times, we listen to people as if they want us to solve their problems for them. So, as soon as we think we have enough information, and they stop speaking, we launch into "fix-it" mode giving our unsolicited answers and advice.

But remember...the goal of presence is not to fix but to be present. So, instead of giving answers, give them support and encouragement. Use your presence to help them feel confident and capable to handle things, rather than assuming they need your help.

Listen till they're done talking...and then wait some more.

Like slowing down, this is one of the harder habits to develop, because it calls you to slow down even more. Few people like uncomfortable silence. So when someone stops talking, we often jump in and say anything to fill the “dead air.”

But, when you do this, you run the risk of side tracking the person from where they need to go, or you run the risk of speaking to a lesser issue when there's something deeper the person needs to get to.

In Old Testament Scripture, you find the story of Job. When Job suffers unimaginable loss and pain, his friends come to be with him. And the first thing they do is sit with him in silence for three days! It's a wonderful demonstration of giving the present of presence. (And...as a side note...when Job's friends finally opened their mouths and started talking, they started making a mess of things.)

Don't be afraid to sit in uncomfortable silence. Sometimes that's the most supportive and present thing you can do.

These are some ways you can give the present of your presences to someone else.

A Final Word...

When you get to the end of your life, you will forget a lot of things. But you will never forget those people who gave you the present of their presences. And you will wish that you had been more present in the lives of the people you care about.

So start now and give the people you love the best present you could ever give them...the present of your presence. It is something they will cherish long after you're gone.