

Why No-Tech Relating Beats High-Tech Distancing Anytime

We practiced social distancing long before we needed a tape measure to create distance. The enemies of presence are many. The seemingly magnetic draw of an idle iPhone compels us to separate from those around us.

It's so difficult to remain present. Our minds rehearse material for meetings later in the day. We check and respond to text messages and simultaneously wish to spend more time with the person seated across from us.

Divorce from table guests has become so prevalent that leadership expert Daniel Montgomery identified the need and wrote a book, *How to Be Present in an Absent World*. In a recent *Greenelines* podcast, he and I discussed the intimacy canyon that can exist anywhere humans gather.

"We see evidence of absence in the home and at work," Montgomery told me. "Over 70% of the workforce is disengaged. If you have a disengaged workforce, it means that people are unconsciously sabotaging their own work. And so what does it mean to be who we are, when we are and where we are? I believe that's the central question of this moment."

Scripture presents still more important principles for connection. One of Solomon's proverbs speaks a firm word. "Whoever isolates himself seeks his own desire; he breaks out against all sound judgment" (Prov. 18:1, ESV). And the New Testament uses a classic analogy to refer to the church: "The human body has many parts, but the many parts make up one whole body. So it is with the body of Christ. ... Yes, the body has many different parts, not just one part" (1 Cor. 12:12, 14, NLT).

Though separation is damaging to productivity at work, it is

alarming when it occurs in the home. The isolation of COVID-19 and its restrictions have caused significant mental health issues within our population. We're depressed. Panicked. Stressed.

One pastor friend told me he asked his local grocer what had taken the place of the iconic toilet paper shortage since that crisis now seems averted. "Alcohol," came the troubling reply. "We can't seem to keep alcohol on our shelves." Isolation leads to consternation, which leads to self-medication, a toxic combination.

This suggests that even though we may be confined together, we're disengaged from one another. We experience isolation because we're present, yet not. Montgomery told me, "There's nothing more disheartening than being in the room with family and feeling lonely. We look around the room, and everyone's connected to their screens."

He further explained, "Our home is a marker of a life of integrity. I want to be the same person whether I'm showing up at church, at home or at work. I want to live an integrated life. I want to be the same guy everywhere," he said. "The root of the word 'integer' is 'one.' A life of integrity is showing up as one person wherever you go."

One of the most important reasons to be present in all of our relationships and divine appointments is the opportunity to speak into lives. Montgomery said, "Think about the people who have influenced your life. They were present for you."

I have lived on the giving and the receiving end of this truth. One of my first mentors, Dr. Charles Green, spoke prophetic words over me when I first walked through the doors of his church as his son's lost teenage friend. Now 93, this godly man still pours into my life today.

Throughout my years in business, my time as a university professor, dean and pastor, God has given me the privilege of

speaking into the lives of others. I enjoy times of imparting truth.

“Research shows that the most impactful leaders are in our neighborhood, or in our home. It’s not politicians or bestselling authors. It’s Mom; it’s Dad. It’s a coach. It’s a neighbor. It’s a youth pastor. Those are the people who change the trajectory of our lives,” Montgomery said. “And we believe leadership is everyone’s business and everyone’s responsibility.”

We must cross the great divide from our high-tech distancing to times of no-tech relating and listening. {eoa}

Dr. Steve Greene is the publisher and executive vice president of the multimedia group at Charisma Media and executive producer of the Charisma Podcast Network. His Charisma House book, *Love Leads*, shows that without love, you cannot be an effective leader. Download his Greenelines podcast at .

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