

What am I actually missing?

I've been paying attention to the smallest details lately...disinfecting, washing, and second-guessing myself when I absent-mindedly rub my eyes or itch my nose. I've never paid so much attention to the last thing that I touched, the person walking the opposite direction on the sidewalk, or the way I open a door handle. Add to these the persistent questions surrounding the way my throat feels, my temperature, or my ability to taste and smell...

Life is really what we pay attention to isn't it?

As I think about the work of higher education on an empty campus, I've come to the conclusion that my schedule is not any less full—the meetings with students and colleagues and the creation of programs designed to achieve learning outcomes remains the daily regimen. It's not what I'm doing that's changed, and certainly not why I'm doing it...it is the how.

So if life is still full of many of the same things, just experienced differently, what am I really missing?

Life has changed a lot here at Taylor. When it became evident that this was going to be far more permanent than any of us hoped, my initial thought was that I would miss the big events: the buzz in the chapel on a warm Friday, the energy in the student center as we come down the final stretch, the students' laughter that regularly enlivens our office. A couple weeks in, I have found that I do miss those things in some ways, but in many ways those are not the things that I'm missing at all.

Here's what I'm missing:

Every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday near 10 am, I can hear the creaking of the chapel chairs through the wall in my office informing me that the chapel is filling and nearing its start. It's really quiet here on those mornings now. I miss that sound.

I miss the energy in the student center to be sure, but what I really miss is the way a warm cup of coffee feels in my hand as I sit across a table from a student—and how the coffee seems to last just about as long as a really good conversation.

Yes, I miss the students' laughter, but I really miss the inflection in students' voices when they share what they're learning or how they are growing. There are hundreds of conversations I have the privilege to bear witness to and they transpire right outside my office. The silence that I experience today betrays the joy of hearing the voices of our students.

I thought it would be these big moments that I would miss, but all things considered, what I'm really missing are the smallest of details. It's not the feature presentations that I long for, but the million minuscule details that animate them.

Life is really what we pay attention to isn't it? Even though it's different, I still have the privilege to participate in a chapel. I still have the buzz of having my entire staff on one chaotic zoom call. I have the blessing of hearing the inflection of students' voices as they share their anxiety about the future and the hope they still cling to nonetheless. But I have to choose it. Paying attention requires will and effort and, if I'm honest, I'm running low on those at times right now.

And yet, there are still some very beautiful things to pay attention to every day. I'm working on that.