The Softening

FOR THE ONE WHO PURSUES

> *The door you've been pounding on opens from the softer side of you.*

If you are the pursuer, your protest has a proud history. You were the one who refused to let the relationship die quietly. Every criticism, every pushed conversation, every escalation was, underneath, a refusal to give up. That loyalty deserves some honor before anyone asks it to change.

And it is being asked to change. Not into silence, but into softness. Because the pounding can never do the one thing you need it to do. It cannot show your partner the fear behind it. All they can see is the fist. The intensity meant to say "you matter enormously to me" arrives on their side of the door as "you are failing enormously." Your longing gets read as an indictment, year after year.

Softening is the pursuer's bravest hour. Lower the voice. Set down the case file. Let the fear itself speak. "I get loud because I panic that I'm losing you. Underneath all of it, I'm afraid I don't matter to you anymore." Words like that change the air in a room. The partner who could not face your anger can very often come toward your fear. Fear invites. Anger accuses.

LET THE FEAR SPEAK

1. Write down your loudest recurring criticism of your partner.
2. Under it, finish this: "When this happens, the fear underneath is ___."
3. Then: "What I most need to know from you is ___."
4. In a calm moment, share only the last two lines. Leave the criticism on the paper.
5. Let your partner respond to your fear, and let their response actually in.

WHEN IT'S HARD

Softening can feel like disarming in enemy territory. If I stop pushing, won't everything I've been fighting for get dropped? Watch what actually happens. People move toward softness far more readily than they ever moved toward pressure. You are not giving up your influence. You are finally using the kind that works.

TO SIT WITH

What has it cost you to be the one who always pushes? Who were you before you had to?

What do you imagine would happen if your partner ever saw the full depth of your fear?

OUR INTENTION THIS WEEK

Something small you can both actually do this week.

WITH YOU ON THE JOURNEY,

Dr. Mark Gregory Karris