



Weathered Love

Nancy and I returned home from church, finished lunch, and we were unwinding on the couch. I had not slept well the night before, and weariness began to settle over me like a heavy rug as Nancy continued talking about her latest artwork. I tried but couldn't keep my mind from drifting. And then my eyes focused on her face.

I'd noticed her changing features before, but somehow this time I saw her anew. Her skin is no longer smooth and supple. Instead, creases

feather her cheeks and forehead. Gone is her naturally dark auburn hair. She colors it blonde to mask the gray.

When I asked Nancy to marry me thirty-two years ago, I thought I knew her. I thought I loved her. Now, half-listening to her describe the colors she planned to use in her next project, I realized how little I really knew her or loved her in 1975.

During our years together, we've weathered many storms, some of them tsunamis. I don't like to even dredge them up in my memory.

Close family members suffered through divorce. Serious illness took Nancy's stepfather. Financial crises and long periods of unemployment rocked our marriage many times. I remember scouring through the pockets of our clothes for loose change so we could buy food for the children.

And then there were job-related moves from one end of the country to the other. We left family, friends and familiar places a dozen times. Sometimes I wonder how we survived. The grace of God? Unquestionably.



BY RICHARD MAFFEO

to our knees before our God.

God's grace, certainly. But something else proves vital to our relationship: Our communication with each other.

I suppose better than eighty percent of our discussions over the years have been superficial. You know the kind—talk about the weather, what's for dinner, what happened at work, the kids have colds, the bills need to be paid... a hundred mundane necessities that surface throughout the day. But because of that superficial eighty percent, Nancy and I can also meet in intimate, deeply personal conversations. We share our hopes, joys, fears and dreams because we've already spent eighty percent of our dialogue learning about each other.

That's why I know her—and love her—so much more today than I did thirty-two years ago. Which brings me to the real point of this article.

Thirty-five years ago I thought I knew Jesus. I thought I loved him. But, oh, how my knowledge of him and my love for him is so very different today than it was in 1972.

Why? Because of God's

Early in my walk with Christ, I learned the importance of communicating with him—and communing with him—every day, in prayer, and study of Scripture. Over the years, I've worn out three Bibles, memorized scores of Scripture texts and can allude to a hundred more. And I've spent time with him in the morning, the evening and throughout the day.

To be honest, most of my prayers (eighty percent?) are probably superficial: Lord, what shall I do about so-and-so? Gerry needs healing. Samantha needs a job. Mark needs guidance. But it is because of that eighty percent that I am comfortable enough, when battles rage beyond my control and I am bloodied, that I can still be intimate with him.

In the first stanza of his poem, "Rabbi Ben Ezra," Robert Browning wrote, "Grow old along with me! The best is yet to be. The last of life, for which the first was made, our times are in His hand Who said 'A whole I planned, youth shows but half; trust God: see all, nor be afraid!'"

As husbands and wives grow old, with and through the grace of God, they learn what love and intimate knowledge of each other looks like. When men and women grow old with God, in and through his grace, they learn to touch eternity's fountain, from which flows the love and knowledge of God.

When life's storms rip at our foundations, when the hot breath of Satan prickles down our neck, our deeply personal knowledge of God will be our fortress. Our passionate love for him, born through intimate communion, will be our strength.

No wonder the prophet wrote: "Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near." (Isaiah 55:6) □

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from the poem "Rabbi Ben Ezra" by Robert Browning (1812–1889)

Intervening from the shadows, often without revealing his hand, our Father brought peace when turmoil overwhelmed us; freedom when fear bound us. He quieted us when, in frustration, we lashed out at each other instead of going

grace. I know him as I do because, as the Lord Jesus said "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him...." (John 6:44).

But I am sure there is something else at work.