

Overcoming the Hazards of Being Close

Off and on this week, I have been listening to The Founder's Week from Moody Bible Institute in Chicago. For over thirty years I have enjoyed the blessing that emanates from this annual event. For anyone who is familiar with this occasion, they will tell you that one of the greatest blessings is to hear the voices of approximately three to four thousand people singing the great hymns of the faith! The music has always been the best you'll hear anywhere. Barbara and I first heard Ron and Gary Matthews, who shall be with us this April, at Founder's Week.

This past Friday I was enjoying the great singing from The Torrey-Gray auditorium on this the ninety-ninth annual meeting named after D.L. Moody. I was in the middle of the room thinking how beautiful the harmony and melody was rolling along, then I got up near the speaker and I heard the unmistakable sound of a man singing as flat as a pancake. In my mind, I imagined one of the ministers sitting a little too close to the microphone. I also thought to myself, "Keep preaching; the gifts and calling of God are without repentance."

In reflection, that is the way life often is: from a distance we can get along with most anybody; it's when we get up close that the problems arise. I John 4:7 says, "*Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.*" In our Lord's earthly ministry He commanded us to love one another, and that by doing so we would show the world what we have is real (John 13:43,35).

Here are some truths that will help us to get along when we have become close:

1. From a close vantage point, flaws become more visible.

This could be the source of the old saying, "Familiarity breeds contempt." When you are close to someone, you see the scars, the lines, the wrinkles and blemishes. Love looks beyond these. Love is about making decisions. One of the things you make up your mind about is seeing beyond the flaws. You love a person for who they are. And who they are is so much more than what we see on the outward. When everyone on the scene of David's anointing was surprised that Samuel was picking the runt of the litter, these words from God were spoken, "*But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart*" (I Samuel 16:7).

2. When we are close, we must always look at the big picture.

There are some in our country that have become critical of the Iraq war of independence that is now being waged. To put it into proper perspective, President Bush allowed for a powerful visual aid that became something that even the president had not premeditated. Earlier in his speech he said, "One of Iraq's leading democracy and human rights advocates is Safia Taleb al-Suhail. She says of her country: 'We were occupied for 35 years by Saddam Hussein. That was the real occupation. Thank you to the American people who paid the cost but most of all to the soldiers.' Eleven years ago, Safia's father was assassinated by Saddam's intelligence service. Three days ago in Baghdad, Safia was finally able to vote for the leaders of her country. And we are honored that she is with us tonight." At the close of this statement, Safia stood to a standing ovation. Then she lifted up stained fingers pointing out that she had voted in her country's first free election. The crowd was electrified.

But the most moving point of the night came after President Bush said as he was nearing the end of his speech said, "Some of our servicemen and women have survived terrible injuries, and this grateful nation will do everything we can to help them recover. And we have said farewell to some very good men and women, who died for our freedom, and whose memory this nation will honor forever. One name we honor is Marine Corps Sgt. Byron Norwood of Pflugerville, Tex., who was killed during the assault on Falluja. His mom, Janet, sent me a letter and told me how much Byron loved being a Marine,

and how proud he was to be on the front line against terror. She wrote: ‘When Byron was home the last time, I said that I wanted to protect him like I had since he was born. He just hugged me and said, ‘You’ve done your job, Mom. Now it’s time for me to protect you.’”

“Ladies and gentlemen, with grateful hearts, we honor freedom's defenders and our military families represented here this evening by Sergeant Norwood's mom and dad, Janet and Bill Norwood.” When this couple, whose son paid the ultimate price with his own life, was acknowledged, the crowd erupted into unending applause. Then as if we could ascend no higher, Saphia, who had been sitting in front of Mr. and Mrs. Norwood, turned around, hugged Mrs. Norwood and thanked her for making the supreme sacrifice for hers and the people of Iraq’s freedom.

What we saw in that one embrace was bigger than Republicans verses Democrats. We saw the big picture. We beheld the incredible patriotism combined with unselfishness that wants to take what we have in America to all areas of the world. Sometimes we can’t see the forest for the trees. *“Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding”* (Proverbs 4:7).

3. Let everything you see bring you closer to Jesus!

Mom told me years ago when someone in authority disappointed me, “People will always let you down; you’ve got to look to Jesus, He’ll never let you down”. And He hasn’t! With every disappointment, I’ve striven to become closer to my Lord. As a result, I’ve had a number of opportunities to get close to Him.

“Who is like unto the LORD our God, who dwelleth on high?” (Psalm 113:5). A hyperactive little boy was challenged by his father to put a rather detailed jig-saw puzzle of the world together. The dad was out of the room for ten minutes and when he returned, much to his surprise, the boy had put the puzzle together. The dad asked, “Son, how did you do this so soon?” The boy said, “Come with me, Dad.” The youngster then scooted beneath the glass table the puzzle was sitting on, with the father scooting beneath it also. The boy pointed up into the glass. On the reverse side of the world was a picture of George Washington. The boy said, “Dad, when I put the man in his place, the whole world came together.” In the crazy mixed up world we live in, we, too, will find when we get Jesus in His rightful place of pre-eminence, our world will come together.

- Pastor Pope -

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