

Voices: Love is deeper than memory loss

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I had lunch recently with my old college math professor Dr. Taylor from Tarleton State University. Dr. Taylor shared with me during lunch about his wonderful marriage to his wife of more than 50 years. He also told me the last six years with her have been very tough.

You see, she was diagnosed with Alzheimer's six years ago. All their plans and all their travels have stopped.

She began to forget things. Before long, she became a danger to be left alone in their home. Four years ago, he said it got so bad he had to put her in a senior care facility. He has loved her through these changes and has driven down to the facility every day since.

He grieved about how sad it is to love someone so much, to have seen so much together, to have gone to bed with them each night for 44 years and then, suddenly, to have to live in separate homes.

He says the last two years have been the worst. Now, Mrs. Taylor does not know her husband at all.

He never has left her side. He spends hours with her every day, and yet gradually and now permanently, he is a total stranger to her. He said her interactions are that of a blank wall. Regardless, he goes each day and spends hours with his wife.

Because she was not eating and was losing weight rapidly, he began to buy her favorite fruits each day, blend them with yogurt and take the treat for her to eat. He gets her out of bed each day and into a wheelchair. He rolls

her out onto the lawn of the senior care center. There, he takes hours doing all he can to get her to eat.

It has worked. She has put on some weight, and her health is getting better. Still, she has no idea who he is. She does not talk. She does not look at him. She gazes into the distance in silence.

A doctor's advice

A doctor told Dr. Taylor the other day that he needs to stop this. He says Dr. Taylor is doing more harm than good, that he is only delaying the inevitable. The doctor told this loving husband it would be better just to let her die.

I was quiet as Dr. Taylor shared his heart with me. He then looked up at me and asked, "Johnny, am I doing her any good at all?"

What do you say to that?

I prayed silently before I answered. I then said very gently, "Dr. Taylor, I don't know what good you are doing her, but I do know the good you are doing for your children and your grandchildren."

He asked, "What is that?"

I said, "You are showing your family the depth of love that a man ought to have for his wife. You are going every day. You are being with her. You are feeding her. You have put your life on hold to love the woman to whom you made a promise.

"What you are doing, Dr. Taylor, is a shining example of how we are to love our spouses—for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health."

He seemed satisfied with my answer. We finished eating and went to our individual responsibilities.

The depth of love. I want to love like that. God loves me that way. He loves you that way. Are you willing to love like that?

Johnny Teague is the senior pastor of Church at the Cross in West Houston and the author of several books. The views expressed are those of the author.