

"What ring?"

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"Will you be my valentine?"

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All you need is love love, love is all you need. These words make for a lovely Beatle's song, but the type of love that most such songs sing about isn't enough. Why? Because the trials, surprises, hurts, wonders of living require something soulful than just heartfelt. However infatuating, love sentimentalized, saccharinized, romanticized only hints at the real deal.

A disclaimer: I'm no expert. Despite delivering hundreds of profound wedding homilies, I'm a clumsy amateur, given my miscues, mistakes, missteps, misunderstandings. I'm a dolt, I know. I recall telling my parents that I proposed and that she said yes. Mom, giddy, said she was excited to see my fiancée's ring. My response: "What ring?" Fifteen minutes later we entered the door of our family jeweler. Yes, I'm a dolt.

Do you love the person for who they are or for who you want them to be? Soulful love conjures the difference between a wedding and a marriage, between happiness and Joy, between a house and a home. Love echoes love.

When we met my pastor to prepare for our marriage and wedding, we received a useful insight. Dr. Hunt simply mentioned how a marriage based on 50-50 isn't good enough. Why are you only giving half of yourself? It really needs to be 100-100. That way, when it sometimes gets to be 75% from one, the other makes it 125%. P.S.: In working with couples planning their weddings, I discovered that how they plan their ceremony is a pretty good indication of their marriage.

One of my favorite lessons about love comes from the 1965 movie, 'Shenandoah.' The young man, named Sam, approaches Jimmy Stewart's character and asks for permission to marry his daughter. He asks: "Why?" "Because I love her," the suitor explains. Rolling his cigar, Stewart drawls: "Do you like her?" The flummoxed young man stammers. Jimmy explains: "There's some difference between lovin' and likin'. When I married Jennie's mother, I-I didn't love her - I liked her... I liked her a lot. I liked Martha for at least three years after we were married and then one day it just dawned on me I loved her. I still do... still do. You see, Sam, when you love a woman without likin' her, the night can be long and cold, and contempt comes up with the sun."

Do you like him? Do you like her?

One of the misdirections with love is how love loves to love love (a James Joyce quote). That is exactly the challenge. Too many folks love being in love, which is why such love is easy to merchandize. Such love sells itself by expecting you to love for what you'll get from it. We can assume the other is there to fill our empty cups and make us happy. If they don't, they are to blame for our unhappiness or dissatisfaction. Gifts can become veiled bargains. Folks loving love are easy to exploit. Loving love is not enough. That's like loving an idea, an expectation, an obligation, and those make empty companions. Tough to dance with an idea or kiss a concept or share the salt in each other's tears

through the years. Here's the secret that isn't much of a secret: We create heaven through flesh and blood. That's what it is all about. The genuine gift of each other.

Still, loving love can tell us how we want and need love. And if that needy love awakens you toward wanting real love, that's a gift.

This is a love that reaches deeper and grows higher, making the who more beautiful than the when or where. A love that turns dreams into truth, horizons into harbors. Love far richer, stronger, than any form of natural love for it is divine love, love as divine energy, not some goal to achieve but the vibrant force by which we live. It makes love's other expressions – affection, friendship, eros – worthwhile. It's love incarnate. It's love unconditional, self-giving, respectful, vulnerable, grounded in impersonal truth, for to love is to be courageous enough to be vulnerable, which makes this love unsafe and dangerous, seeking what is good regardless. A love that fights. Fighting for the light, what is just, what is heavenly: "Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm; for love is strong as death, passion fierce as the grave. Its flashes are flashes of fire, a raging flame. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it."