

*Never marry except for love; but see that you love what is lovely.*

(Philippians 4: 8, *The Message*) Summing it all up, friends, I'd say you'll do best by filling your minds and meditating on things true, noble, reputable, authentic, compelling, gracious—the best, not the worst; the beautiful, not the ugly; things to praise, not things to curse.

I was talking with someone not long ago. He has been married quite a number of years, but he and his wife are on the verge of separating. (Don't look around and try to guess who I'm talking about. It isn't anyone in the Meeting.) So I was talking with him, encouraging him to get counseling and stay in the marriage. I asked him, "Do you love your wife?"

He said, "I love her, but I'm not in love with her."

I said, "Oh, geez."

He said, "What do you mean, 'Oh, geez.' Aren't you in love with Joan?"

I said, "Thank God, no. I love her, but I'm not in love with her. And here's the difference, being *in love* with someone is a feeling. Being *in love* is about how someone else makes you feel—giddy and hormonal and ready to go to the prom. But loving someone is a decision—a decision to seek the very best for the beloved. Now love might start with being in love, in fact it usually does. But if love doesn't progress from a giddy feeling to a dedicated commitment, we're sunk.

Sometimes when I marry a couple, I'll ask them why they want to get married. If they say they're *in love*, I advise them to get over it as quickly as possible. Because being in love is such a transitory thing. It is far better to love. To love, I mean the decision to seek the best for the beloved, to seek their growth, their wholeness, their deepest happiness. This is the difference between being *in love* with someone, and *loving* someone. Being *in love* is about how you or I might feel, so it is primarily concerned with self. *Loving* someone is the conscious decision to enrich the life of another. One is emotional, the other deliberate. One is transitory, fleeting, temporary, a stage we pass through on our way to something more enduring and transforming.

That's my first point. Love is a decision, not a feeling. I like only having one point to my messages, but this time I have one more thing for us to consider. So let's shift our focus a bit and think about what it means to love what is lovely. I don't know the extent to which Penn might have been inspired by the Apostle Paul, but they seemed to be aiming toward a shared ideal. Penn was more succinct, advising us to love what is lovely. Paul was more poetic. "Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. (Philippians 4:8)

I remember when I first moved to Plainfield, I met an elderly woman named Olive Charles. She was a Quaker and a retired teacher at a Friend's school. We lived in the same block in the old downtown part of Plainfield. Shortly after I met her, a group home was established for children and teens suffering from mental retardation. They had purchased the house next to Olive's house, despite some objections from people in the neighborhood. But Olive welcomed the children and teens with open arms, opening her home to them, visiting them, celebrating their birthdays, inviting them to meeting for worship at our Quaker meeting, where she arranged for a Sunday school teacher trained to work with mentally and emotionally challenged children.

I was single at the time and when I would get lonely, I would walk through the alley to Olive's house, often around suppertime, and visit with her. I always enjoyed her friendship and being in her home. I couldn't quite put my finger on it, but whenever I was there I felt so peaceful and welcomed and important. And, you know, everyone wants to feel important, everyone wants to feel as if they matter. I don't think I understood why I enjoyed being around Olive Charles. It wasn't something I could verbalize. I wasn't old enough or reflective enough to understand it. I just knew I enjoyed her company and friendship.

Now, these many years later, I understand why I enjoyed her company. It was because Olive Charles loved what is lovely. She saw the best in people, not the worst. She was affirming and helpful and steeped in grace. She looked for opportunities to bless and encourage and uplift people. She was, in the deepest sense of the word, lovely.

Loving what is lovely doesn't mean loving those people who are physically attractive. It means deciding, over and over again, to value the virtues of kindness, goodness, honesty, wisdom, optimism, and justice. It means not celebrating when someone meets with misfortune, even if that person has been unkind to us. To love what is lovely means we look for even the slightest bit of good in even the most difficult and troubled people, remembering that not everyone has had our blessings and good fortune.

Sam and I were at Casey's gas station this past week filling the truck with gas. We went into pay and the man ahead of us bought a lottery ticket. I don't like the lottery and sometimes, when I'm in a hurry to pay for my gas and leave, I become annoyed with the people who play the lottery. That day, the man ahead of us won \$150,000. He was so shaken he could barely speak. Sam and I went outside and got back in the truck. I turned to Sam and was getting ready to tell him how bad the lottery was and how foolish it was to participate in it.

I didn't want him to get the idea that playing the lottery was the way to get ahead in life. So I was getting ready to just dump all this negative stuff on him, but he spoke first. He said, "Wow, I'm really happy for that guy. I bet he really needs that money."

That's one of the reasons I love my son. I kind of grumble through life looking for the downside and Sam saw a guy who had probably been praying for help in these tough economic times and had finally gotten it.

So two lessons today: Marry only for love, but see that you love what is lovely.

Love is a decision, not a feeling. It is the decision to commit to the growth and happiness of the beloved.

Love what is lovely. Fill your mind with that which is true, noble, reputable, authentic, compelling, and gracious—the best, not the worst; the beautiful, not the ugly; look for things to praise, not things to curse.