

COLLEGE TRANSITION INITIATIVE

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HELPING TEENS (RE)ORDER LOVE AND LIFE:

DAVID NAUGLE INTERVIEW

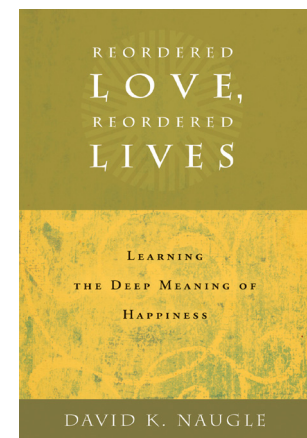
By Derek Melleby

Introduction

Most of the time I cringe when I hear someone offer this advice: "You have to do what makes you happy." I've seen too many people follow this counsel to its logical conclusion, only to be hurt and lost. Happiness is fleeting. What makes us individually happy is rarely a way to measure a good life. When we offer advice like this, I wonder if we are more concerned that the person needing the guidance avoids pain and feels better about him or herself. Are you happy in this relationship? Are you happy in your job? Are you happy in your \$50,000 convertible? Is happiness really the issue here?

David K. Naugle is professor of philosophy at Dallas Baptist University and has written about shallow attempts to define happiness. His important book *Reordered Love, Reordered Lives: Learning the Deep Meaning of Happiness* (Eerdmans) helps readers make the connection between happiness and love. The book is instructive for those who desire to pass along Christian faith to the next generation. Naugle writes, "Scientific, economic, and cultural forces have produced a paradigm shift in the way most people understand happiness. It has morphed in the minds of many Americans into a promise of sustained pleasure and painlessness." According to Naugle, Christians must develop an understanding of happiness that is countercultural: "The happy life consists of learning how to love both God supremely and the world in the right way at the very same time."

Dr. Naugle is also the author of *Worldview: The History of a Concept* (Eerdmans), selected as a 2003 *Christianity Today* Book of the Year. What follows is an interview with him about *Reordered Love, Reordered Lives*:



"We can't just impart biblical information and expect much to happen. Our deepest loves, affections and desires must be reordered for lives to change in a Christ-like way."

- David Naugle

Interview

CTI: What motivated you to write about love?

Naugle: Over the years, I have become convinced that people don't necessarily do what they say they will do, or behave according to their *beliefs*, or act on the basis of their *thoughts or ideas*. However, at the end of the day, people will do what they *love*!

Augustine put it like this in his book *Enchiridion*: "For when there is a question as to whether a man is good, one does not ask what he believes, or what he hopes, but what he loves." We are motivated to do what we do by the things we love, care about and desire. Our lifestyles follow our loves; our loves lead to our lifestyles.

It seems to me that this has been the missing element in various Christian programs of moral and spiritual formation. We can't just impart biblical information and expect much to happen. Our deepest loves, affections and desires must be reordered for lives to change in a Christ-like way.

But our loves and lives remain severely disordered, especially because of cultural influence. No one knows this better than CPYU! In light of the biblical teaching on love which is the nature of God, at the heart of the greatest commandments, and is the chief of virtues (1 John 4; Matthew 22; 1 Corinthians 13), a book on love and the necessity of reordering our loves, seemed like a good idea.

"As extraordinarily needy and ignorant people in search of a fulfilling life in a deeply fallen world, we attach our loves in intense ways to whatever we think will make us happy, whether it be people, places or things."

CTI: On the surface, it does seem obvious that love is related to happiness, but what is the deeper meaning? Where do we often get love and happiness wrong in our culture?

Naugle: If we follow the main outline of the biblical story, we discover that God intended for us to enjoy the deep meaning of happiness (or *shalom*, as it's called in the Hebrew Old Testament) rooted in rightly ordered loves for God and for everything else under and in Him.

When we sinned, however, we lost this deep meaning of happiness found in God and in his good creation, rightly related. However, we did not lose our love or longing for happiness; in fact, it may have even deepened, even if it was distorted and disordered.

As extraordinarily needy and ignorant people in search of a fulfilling life in a deeply fallen world, we attach our loves in intense ways to whatever we think will make us happy, whether it be people, places or things.

But these people, places or things that we love for happiness' sake fail us every time. They promise the satisfaction we have been longing for, but they fail to keep their promises. They simply are not made to do so. We end up frustrated once again. As Bono famously sings: "I still haven't found what I'm looking for!"

Out of this disordered love in search for happiness, our lives become a mess, a wreck, especially because of our idolatries, vices, habits, and addictions. We will turn to crime, violence, and even warfare, if that's what we think



it will take to get what we want, since our deepest sense of self and overall well-being depends on it. See James 4:1-2, for example.

Not only our own ignorance, but the false, misleading messages of our culture through music, TV, films, and advertisements also misdirect us and lead us into a big, ugly ditch (to put it mildly) ... all in search of happiness! As Augustine once said, "... what am I to myself but a guide to my own self-destruction?"

This is precisely where the Christian gospel enters the picture. When we believe in Jesus Christ and what He has done for us in His life, death, and resurrection, our sins are forgiven and we are reconnected to God. He then enables us to love God and everything else in God in reordered ways. We don't reject the world, but worldliness; we don't reject creation, but its corruption. In other words, we seek to love the created world in a reordered and right way in God as its creator and redeemer.

This, I believe, is the key to discovering the deep meaning of happiness both now and forever! Reordered love and reordered lives and the discovery of the deep meaning of happiness are the primary benefits of the Christian faith and God's good news about Jesus Christ!

Thus, the connection between love and happiness, as I try to develop it, follows the major points of the overall biblical narrative, and I can summarize the story like this:

- The deep meaning of happiness in God as He intended at creation rooted in *rightly* ordered loves and lives;
- Happiness lost in the fall of humanity into sin and replaced with devastating ignorance and *disordered* loves and lives;
- The deep meaning of happiness already redeemed and one day fully restored in Jesus Christ who graciously *reorders* our loves and lives through the Christian gospel.

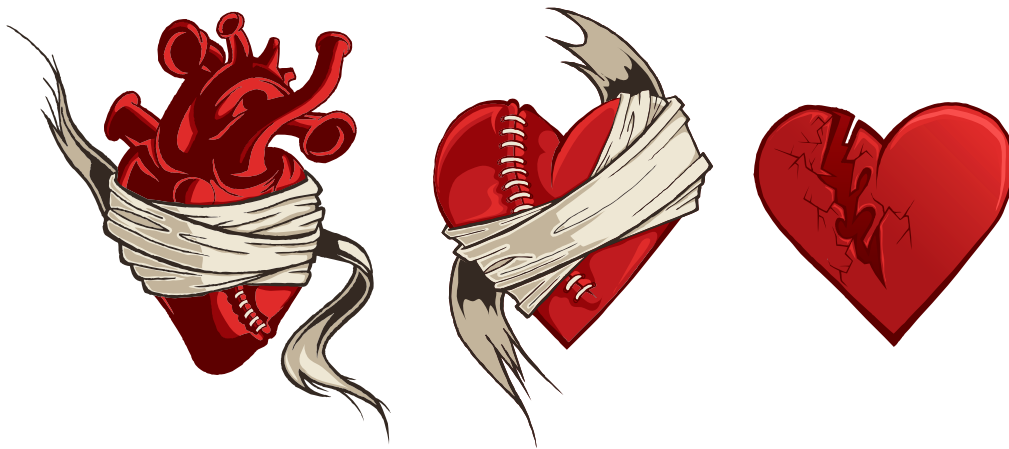


The Deep Meaning of Happiness:

- ***The deep meaning of happiness in God as He intended at CREATION rooted in rightly ordered loves and lives;***
- ***Happiness lost in the FALL of humanity into sin and replaced with devastating ignorance and disordered loves and lives;***
- ***The deep meaning of happiness already REDEEMED and one day fully restored in Jesus Christ who graciously reorders our loves and lives through the Christian gospel.***



“The deep meaning of happiness we experience now is not perfect and never will be. Presently, we live between the cross and the consummation, at the ‘hyphen’ between the ‘already’ but the ‘not yet.’ Consequently, at this time in God’s narrative plan for history, we must enroll in the school of Christ for the ongoing mending of our hearts.”



CTI: This is from the review of your book in *Publisher’s Weekly*: “Many Christians will enjoy this book and be renewed in their quest for true happiness. Others will not, given the author’s insistence that accepting Jesus is the only way to real happiness. In a religiously pluralistic world, the wisdom of Christianity can be shared with everyone if presented correctly.” How do you respond to this?

Naugle: Well, actually, though *PW* (*Publisher’s Weekly*) didn’t intend it as such, I take their criticism as a compliment. I didn’t cave into politically correct religious pluralism! Furthermore, my goal was to do what *PW* said I should have done, namely to show how “the wisdom of Christianity can be shared with everyone if presented correctly.”

PW thinks I failed at this, but I think I succeeded (Lord willing), especially by appealing to various expressions of popular culture that show how our disordered loves can disorder our lives and make us miserable. For example, Alan Jackson’s C&W song — “Everything I love Is Killing Me” — hits the nail on the head! And Johnny Cash’s return to faith shows how his reordered love for God reordered his life, and brought him into an experience of the deep meaning of happiness. And what happened to Cash can happen to us as well.

In this sense, then, my book is a form of cultural apologetics, showing how Jesus Christ is the sweet fulfillment of our deepest longings and desires as we search and find the genuinely happy life in Him (I am employing Charlie Peacock’s thoughts from his endorsement on the back of the book).



By Derek Melleby

HELPING TEENS (RE)ORDER LOVE AND LIFE

CTI: What are some practical ways that parents and youth workers can help teenagers “reorder” their loves?

Naugle: In many ways, this is what the seventh and last chapter in the book are all about. There I point out that the deep meaning of happiness we experience now is not perfect and never will be. Presently, we live between the cross and the consummation, at the “hyphen” between the “already” but the “not yet.”

Consequently, at this time in God’s narrative plan for history, we must enroll in the school of Christ for the ongoing mending of our hearts. In Christ’s school of followership, the Christian practices make up the curriculum for life change and consistency. It’s unnecessary to reinvent the wheel on this subject of the

Christian practices since so many good books are already available by authors like Richard Foster and Dallas Willard. I recommend them highly.

However, what may be of particular interest to parents, youth workers, and students is my own autobiographical description of “The Disciplines and Me” on pages 193-203. Here I talk about the Christian practices I learned from my mentors early on as a student that have served me well over the years. I talk about the Bible and books, church and community, prayer, the enemies of the Christian life, virtue and vice, thinking, loving and doing, and so on. Hopefully a portion of my own story may be of inspiration in the “how to reorder our loves” department.



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For more college transition resources visit CPYU’s College Transition Initiative at ***CollegeTransitionInitiative.com***.

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Derek Melleby is the director of CPYU’s College Transition Initiative, coauthor of *Learning for the Love of God: A Student’s Guide to Academic Faithfulness* (Brazos Press) and author of *Make College Count: A Faithful Guide to Life and Learning* (Baker Books).