

Theology Live!
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“Tainted Love”
or
“Reordered Love, Reordered Lives:
Learning the Deep Meaning of Happiness”¹

Introduction

"Coach, I can't do it. I've ruined you, I've ruined myself, I've ruined the University of California. I couldn't face that crowd to save my life. Roy, get up and go back out there — the game is only half over."

~ Halftime exchange between Roy “Wrong Way” Riegels
and University of California head coach Nibs Price @
the Rose Bowl, January 1, 1929, Pasadena, California

Have you ever had that kind of empty, sinking feeling in your heart that you’ve gotten turned around somehow and are just heading in the wrong direction? Roy Riegels would know exactly how you feel!

Roy Riegels was the all-American center and captain-elect for the University of California Golden Bears who played against the Georgia Tech Yellow Jackets in the January 1, 1929 Rose Bowl in Pasadena, California. Riegels recovered a football fumbled by the Georgia Tech running back “Stumpy” Thomason. But Riegels got bumped, spun around, and then seeing a wide-open field ahead of him, he took off toward the goal line some 65 yards away just as fast as he could go. The only problem was ... he was heading in the wrong direction! One of his teammates, Benny Lom, known for his speed, chased Riegels half the distance of the field, shouting at the top of his lungs: "Stop! Stop! Turn back, Roy.... You're going the wrong way!"

He got no response from Riegels, so Lom tackled him at the Georgia Tech one yard line, barely keeping him from making a touchdown for the other team! Riegels was so distraught over his embarrassing mistake that his coach Nibs Price had to cajole him into returning to the game for the second half:

¹ David Naugle, *Reordered Love, Reordered Lives: Learning the Deep Meaning of Happiness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), forthcoming in October.

Riegels: Coach, I can't do it. I've ruined you, I've ruined myself, I've ruined the University of California. I couldn't face that crowd to save my life.

Price: Roy, get up and go back out there — the game is only half over.

The UC Golden Bears chose to punt from their end zone rather than risk a play, but Georgia Tech blocked the kick and scored a safety, giving them a 2-0 lead. California eventually scored a touchdown and kicked an extra point, but by tacking on an additional six points, Georgia Tech would go on to win the game and their second national championship by a final score of 8-7.

Riegels *faux faux* proved to be deciding factor.

From that day forward, Roy Riegels was known as “Wrong Way” Riegels until his death at the age of eighty-four in 1993. In the aftermath of his egregious error, Riegels received a multitude of gifts - upside down cakes, railroad tickets for the last car on the train, even proposals of marriage on the 1-yard line.

The phrase "Wrong Way" Riegels became something of a national slogan for anyone who makes an embarrassing mistake in public. In 2003, a panel from the College Football Hall of Fame and CBS Sports chose Riegels' "Wrong way run in the Rose Bowl" as one of six "Most Memorable Moments of the [20th] Century" in college football.

By the way, as you might imagine, this has happened more than once. In a regular NFL season game in 1964, Jim Marshall of the Minnesota Vikings also ran a recovered fumble into his own end zone, and actually scored for the other team. Riegels reportedly later sent Marshall a letter saying, "Welcome to the club."² Marshall's mistake, by the way, was the subject of an old *I've Got a Secret* episode, hosted by Steve Allen that you can see on You Tube!³

I think that these instances of going the wrong way on the football field would be a great plot for a commercial in the Southwest Airlines, “Wanna Get Away?” advertising campaign! Picture it: a football player intercepts a pass or

² I have summarized Roy Riegels' story from these two online sources: <http://gtalumni.org/news/magazine/spr98/div04.html> and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roy_Riegels. Accessed June 3, 2008.

³ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c3T4GZfPIAs>. Accessed July 3, 2008.

recovers a fumble, runs the wrong way, scores for the other team, does a victory dance in the end zone. Then a team member runs up to him, informs him of his mistake, as unmistakable chagrin covers his face. And then the tag line: “Wanna Get Away?”

In any case, the day after the disastrous 1929 Rose Bowl game, Roy Riegels said candidly in interview: “In pivoting off a tackler, I completely lost my bearings.” As a result, he just went the wrong way.

Now here is the point I’d like to make about our topic for tonight on tainted love: when it comes to the search for happiness, especially through the things that we love, like “Wrong Way” Riegels, many of us have lost our bearings and are simply going in the wrong direction. As Henry Drummond put it, “half the world is on the wrong scent in pursuit of happiness.”⁴ Drummond was probably rather generous in limiting the confused and misdirected to only half of us!

In the acclaimed Nasher Sculpture Center in the Dallas arts district, there is a beautiful bronze statue of a woman who seems to embody this inevitable condition of confusion and misdirection, of brokenness and pain.

The work is by the noted French sculptor Aristide Maillol (1861-1944) and is provocatively titled “Night” (*La Nuit*). The female figure is folded in upon herself in an upright fetal position with her feet together and her knees pulled up tightly towards her chest. Her bowed head is buried in her crossed arms as they rest atop her knees in an apparent state of weariness and introspection. Amidst all the possible meanings embodied in this beautiful work, I think we can be certain of at least one thing: at some level the happiness quotient of this woman’s life is under negotiation. Imaginatively, the woman represented in the Maillol sculpture could probably empathize with Leo Tolstoy’s conflicted character Anna Karenina, who on one occasion said, “I’m simply unhappy. If anyone is unhappy, I am.”⁵

Such a crestfallen condition is not uncommon. We too may feel

⁴ Henry Drummond, *The Greatest Thing in the World* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company Publishers, n.d.), p. 16.

⁵ Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, trans. Constance Garnett, intro. Henry Troyat (New York: The Modern Library, Random House, 1950), p. 749.

emotionally fragile and depleted; we too may consider our troubles as vast as the sea, as great as a galaxy. Our lives are often miserable. Is there any sorrow like my sorrow? Is there any pain like my pain? Is there any loneliness like my loneliness? Is there any confusion, any emptiness like my confusion, like my emptiness? Maybe those in ancient times who once observed birthdays with tears and celebrated funerals with joy knew what they were doing!

Throughout this talk, then, I proceed with the assumption of a broken heart. If my assumption is premature or incorrect in your case (and that's unlikely), then it's just a matter of time before the inevitable occurs. The world fractures everyone's heart sometime, somehow, somehow, to one degree or another.

No one is exempt. In the midst of our difficult circumstances, we feel the weight of our woes and long for some semblance of a happy life once again. Hope springs eternal in the human breast (Alexander Pope).

The perhaps surprising thing to learn is that genuine happiness in the deepest, strongest, sturdiest, most meaningful sense of the word was originally God's idea. If we read the story of creation in Genesis 1-2 carefully, we will discover that there were at least six ingredients in God's recipe for the happy life:

1. Intimate relationship with God the creator
2. Fulfilling work to do
3. Human companionship, especially as male and female in the context of marriage and family
4. Food and drink
5. Rest, recreation, and play
6. Pleasant places and surroundings

This was our original "state made perfect by the aggregation [combination] of all good things"⁶ — spiritually, vocationally, socially, nutritionally, sabbatically,

⁶ Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy* 4.2, quoted in Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, rev. Daniel J. Sullivan, *Great*

and habitationally. Obviously, God intended us to live fully in the overflow of indescribable blessing mediated through the many aspects of God's marvelous world in a complete and satisfying way. This was not a *hedonistic*, but an *edenistic* happiness that roots the fulfillment of human life in God and his creation.

This delightful plan and purpose of God for us as His privileged people and for our privileged planet couldn't be better encapsulated than in the beautiful Hebrew word *shalom*. This word means peace and tranquility to be sure; but it also signifies at a deeper level the soundness, wholeness, security, well-being, blessing, and in general, the rich human flourishing, we were to discover in relating to God and to his very good world, properly.

Then the unthinkable happened. We sinned and threw all this away. In traditional Jewish and Christian understanding, the story of the fall of humanity into sin in Genesis 3 explains the origin of evil and suffering in the world, and accounts for the tragic and unhappy character of the human condition.

The world and our lives are now flooded with abnormalities so prevalent that they seem all too normal: idolatry, immorality, falsehood, warfare, disease, famine, earthquakes, poverty, injustice, greed, and so on. Life and the world are no longer the way they are supposed to be. *Shalom* has been vandalized. The peace has been drastically disturbed.⁷

Though modern assumptions lead us to brush this early Genesis narrative aside as an inconsequential myth, we must take its message seriously. As Catholic philosopher Peter Kreeft of Boston College states, "What happened in Eden may be hard to understand, but it makes everything else understandable."⁸

Books of the Western World, ed. Robert Maynard Hutchins, vol. 19 (Chicago: William Benton, Publisher, Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., 1952), p. 150 (§1.1.Q26).

⁷ Cornelius Plantinga Jr., *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), chapter 1.

⁸ Peter J. Kreeft, "C. S. Lewis's Argument from Desire," in *G. K. Chesterton and C. S. Lewis: The Riddle of Joy*, ed. Michael H. Macdonald and Andrew A. Tadie, foreword Janet

What this story helps us to understand is our devastating brokenness, including our sadness and our unhappiness, about which Bob Dylan sings mournfully in one of his classic songs, “Everything is Broken.”

Broken bottles, broken plates,
Broken switches, broken gates,
Broken dishes, broken parts,
Streets are filled with broken hearts.
Broken words never meant to be spoken,
Everything is broken.⁹

In the fall of humanity into sin, then, we lost happiness. But as St. Augustine rightly points out, we did not, in any way, shape, or form, lose our love or our longing for happiness. In fact, our longing and love for happiness may have deepened, because what we once enjoyed is now gone, and so much misery has replaced it. Now we deeply brokenhearted ones resolve, even more intensely, to find enduring delights and consolations that make our lives bearable, if not enjoyable, once again. As one bumper sticker puts it: *In Search of the Eternal Buzz*. We are in hot pursuit of happiness, even though we are clueless when it comes to knowing what it is and/or how to get it. We don't know what we're doing! Let's do it again!¹⁰

As if we are comatose or on autopilot, we human beings are exceedingly busy and active, and our deepest loves and desires are the sources and springs of all the busyness and activity, inspiring and empowering us to do what we do.

- ❖ It is love and desire for money and wealth that motivate the GREEDY person eager for success and profit. What motivates the Donald Trump, Jrs. of the world?
- ❖ It is love and desire for recognition and glory that motivate the EGOTISTICAL person seeking celebrity and fame. What motivates the would-be American Idols of the world?

Blumberg Knedlik (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), p. 260.

⁹ Bob Dylan, “Everything is Broken,” from the CD *Oh Mercy*, Sony, 1989.

¹⁰ From Switchfoot's song “Amateur Lovers,” from the CD *Oh! Gravity*, Sony, 2006.

- ❖ It is love and desire for pleasure or power that motivate the SENSUAL person in search of sexual experience or conquest. What motivates the Hugh Hefner, Jrs. of the world?

To be sure, life and the world go on from age to age, in constant activity and effort, in pursuit of these and many other things, all motivated by our deepest loves, desires and affections. But if you take away our deepest loves, desires, and affections, then all our activities and efforts would cease, and life itself would grind to a screeching halt.¹¹ And even if we aren't consciously aware of it, happiness is what we are ultimately after. As Aristotle once noted, happiness is desirable for its own sake; happiness is its own end, and it's for the sake of happiness we do everything else.¹²

This is exactly where "tainted love" comes in. In our ignorance, and deception fostered by our own blindness and the false messages of our culture, we attach ourselves to things in hopes that those things we love so taintedly, so disorderly will make us happy!

Think of Gollum in J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. Though he was actually a Hobbit, his tainted or inordinate love for the one ring and the power it afforded transformed from enviable Hobbithood into the ugly, despicable, miserable creature he became. "Precious, precious, precious!" Gollum cried. "My Precious! O my Precious!"¹³

Indeed, Gollum's 'R' us! How easy it is for a person, place or thing simply to become too "precious" to us. When we detect our limitations, feel needy or incomplete, or have an experience of a mysterious longing for the infinite or eternal, we attach ourselves in love to various things we hope and pray will supply the happiness we desire and satisfy that deep sense of fulfillment we

¹¹ Paraphrased from Jonathan Edwards, *Treatise on the Religious Affections*.

¹² Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 1, chapters 4, 7 (1094b8, 1095b32, 1097a25-b21)

¹³ J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1994), p. 925.

have been searching for all our lives.

Mega-problems arise, however, when we leave God out of the picture. We fail to grasp the *nature* of the objects we love and what they can do for us; we fail to recognize the inordinate *manner* in which we love the things we love; we miscalculate what we should expect regarding the outcomes of our love and the things we love. We tend to think that we can find happiness in this world by ourselves especially through the things we love.

Without God at the top, however, many of us fail to grasp the unique character of each object we love and the proper place it should hold and the purpose should fill in our lives. Consequently, we love things *unintelligently*, *excessively*, and *unrealistically*, that is, in the manner of tainted or disordered love. “Look what a mess we’ve made of love!”¹⁴ No wonder we ourselves and our lives are in such a mess. For, indeed, tainted or disordered love breeds tainted and disordered lives. How, you might ask? The answer is found in idolatry, the seven deadly sins, habits and addictions, and even crime and violence as the chief culprits.

In idolatry, we love, worship, and serve some aspect of the creation independently of the creator, since we humans cannot *not* worship! As the French thinker Pascal put it, “He [God] only is our true good, and since we have forsaken him, ... there is nothing in nature [creation] which has not be serviceable in taking His place....”¹⁵

In terms of the seven deadly sins, there is pride, envy, anger, sloth, avarice/greed, gluttony and lust are all manifestations of tainted or disordered love. If these things we pursue fail to satisfy us, we will continue at them harder and harder, full-throttle, often to the point of excessive, unhealthy dependence. Hence, arise our bad habits and deadly addictions. We will also resort to various

¹⁴ Switchfoot, “Ammunition,” from the CD *The Beautiful Letdown*, Sony/Columbia/BMG, 2003.

¹⁵ Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, trans. W. F. Trotter, *Great Books of the Western World*, ed., Robert Maynard Hutchins, vol. 33 (Chicago: William Benton, Publisher, Encyclopedia Britannica Inc., 1952), p. 244 (#425).

crimes and violence (even on a grand scale — think war), if this is what we think it takes to get what we want. Tainted or disordered love, then, explains the disorder in our lives, and it also clarifies the source of the tragic nature of human history, all motivated by the need to satisfy the cavernous hunger for happiness in our hearts.

At this point it should be pretty easy to see how, when it comes to our quest for happiness through the things we love, most all of us are “Wrong Way” Riegels. We have lost our bearings and are heading in the wrong direction. Welcome to the club!

What, if anything, can deliver us from our misdirected, desolate and disconsolate state? The answer lies in the Christian gospel centered on the person and achievements of Jesus Christ.

If you have been following the many cultural maps to happiness for years on end, but have gotten lost every time; if you are frustrated in your toilsome efforts (finding happiness is hard work!) to find contentment, but are living a life of “quiet desperation” (Henry D. Thoreau); if the great things you have trusted in have failed you and let you down every time, and you find yourself on the brink of despair. In short, if you are in a restless mess, then isn’t it time to consider a new map, try a new method, and look to a new object of hope?

In Switchfoot’s musical imagination, multiple disappointments are blessings in disguise since they amount to a “beautiful letdown” and force you to consider an option that may not have even been on your radar before.

It was a beautiful let down
When I crashed and burned
When I found myself alone unknown and hurt
It was a beautiful let down
The day I knew
That all the riches this world had to offer me
Would never do.¹⁶

¹⁶ Switchfoot, “Beautiful Letdown,” from the CD *The Beautiful Letdown*, Sony, 2003.

What will do, however, is Jesus Christ.

The Bible and the church have historically taught that Jesus Christ was God in the flesh — fully God and fully man. In the gospels in the New Testament (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John), Jesus as the God-Man performed many amazing miracles, taught many incredible things, and made many astonishing claims.

So, if you are spiritually hungry and looking for food and drink, if you are in the dark and need illumination, if you are confused and can't find the door, if you are fearful and needy, and cry out for provision and protection, if you are sacred of death and long for life, if you have lost your bearings and need to know the way, if you feel useless and want to productive then Jesus as the bread of life, the light of the world, the door of the sheep, the good shepherd, the resurrection and the life, the way, truth and life, and the true vine is the one for you!

His perfect life is the basis for the gift of righteousness in God's sight through faith. His crucifixion atones for sins and provides for mercy, grace and forgiveness. His resurrection secures victory over death. Christ's work of redemption reconnects us to God and makes all things new! Receive the love of God in Christ so as to be saved. Trust in him wholeheartedly. Cast yourself unreservedly upon Jesus to be your Lord and Savior. Old things will pass away and new things will come. All who are in Christ are new creatures, new creations!

It's "belief over misery."¹⁷ St. Augustine famously said: O Lord, you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you!¹⁸ Indeed, without God, our hearts are achingly empty, very agitated, often perplexed, surprisingly hardened, amazingly selfish, extremely exhausted, burdened, irritable, fidgety and so on. But with God, the reverse is true. Christ restores to us

¹⁷ This phrase is from the lyrics to "This Is Home," a song written and recorded by Switchfoot featured on the soundtrack for the 2008 film *The Chronicles of Narnia: Prince Caspian*, also appearing in the end credits of the film.

¹⁸ Augustine, *Confessions*, 1.1

the deep, strong, sturdy meaning of peace and happiness in God who causes everything else to fall into place.

To be sure, Christ “saves us” and promises us a place with God eternally in “heaven,” or more accurately, in the new heavens and new earth (Revelation 21-22). But this is just the icing on the cake! I believe there is life after birth and life before death. Equally, if not more important, then, is the fact that in reconnecting us to God, a chief benefit of the gospel, of trusting in Christ and becoming a Christian is that our new found faith reorders our deepest loves and affections, and gives us new purposes and desires ... for life in this world, in the here and now!

Our tainted or disordered loves are displaced by reordered loves, as we learn to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength as required by the first greatest commandment. In making God our priority and learning to love him supremely, we also discover how to love ourselves properly in him, how to love our neighbors even as we love ourselves in the way we should, and, indeed, how to love the whole creation and all it contains, as the second greatest commandment requires. Reordered love implanted a transformed heart becomes the distinctive mark, the real tattoo, if you will, of the Christian.

Reordered love cannot help but reorder our lives in profound and practical ways. Various idolatries give way to a genuine worship of God — in our personal lives, in our public lives, and in church. Intellectual, moral, and physical virtues also begin to replace multiple vices. It’s no longer pride, envy, anger, sloth, greed, gluttony and lust, but faith, hope and love, courage, justice, temperance and prudence. The power of God’s renovating love breaks the strong chains of our habits and addictions since our ultimate fulfillment is found in God who enables us to enjoy all things in a healthy way. Our reordered love also undermines any inclinations toward crime and violence, for now we resort to God, not to various offenses or violence to secure what we really need.

Of course, the authentic version of peace and happiness — of *shalom* — we experience here and now as a result of the reordering of our loves and lives through the gospel is significant, but not yet complete. At this stage in God’s

narrative plan for history, we live in between the times of Christ's first and second comings and much remains to be done.

Presently we have work to do, callings to fulfill, and service to render. We are called upon to sacrifice and suffer for Christ and others, indeed, for his glory and their good. This way of the cross and the deep meaning of happiness, however, are not incompatible, but are integrally connected. We do, however, need to enroll at this time in the school of Christ for the ongoing mending of our hearts. We are his student-disciples in an educational program in which the knowledge and practice of the spiritual disciplines is at the heart of the curriculum. We are persons in progress on the way, and Jesus is our example.

So, it's really important to begin heading down the road in the right direction. In *Mere Christianity*, C. S. Lewis wrote: "If you are on the wrong road, progress means doing an about-face and walking back to the right road; and in that case the man who turns back soonest is the most progressive man."¹⁹

To conclude, then, let me tell you the story about a contemporary figure in the world of sports, a "Wrong Way" Riegels in his personal life, who realized he had lost his bearings and was clearly heading in the wrong direction. This person realized his mistake before it was too late, before he crossed into the end zone, so to speak, and he reversed his course. He did an about-face, as Lewis recommended.

The athlete I am referring to is the present center fielder for the Texas Rangers, Josh Hamilton. Currently he is one of the best hitters in the American league, perhaps in all of baseball. According to YahooSports.com, his batting average is .308 with nineteen home runs, eighty-two RBIs, fifty-three runs scored, and four stolen bases.²⁰

For quite sometime, however, Hamilton struggled with drug and alcohol abuse that caused his rapid fall from the top pick in the 1999 amateur baseball

¹⁹ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York, NY: Touchstone Edition, 1980), p. 36.

²⁰ Josh Hamilton stats available at: <http://sports.yahoo.com/mlb/players/6679>. Accessed July 3, 2008.

draft to a 180 pound phantom of a man in just a few short years. Through the diligent prayers of his faithful wife Katie, he waged a successful battle against addiction after many set backs.

His deliverance came on October 5, 2006, the day he chose sobriety instead of what was surely premature death. His wife's example of faith proved to be the tipping point. In telling his story in an Q&A format to about 500 fans after the Cincinnati Reds game on Sunday night, June 1 at the Rangers Ballpark in Arlington, Hamilton stated: "Seeing how she [Katie] took care of two kids and carried herself and the way she handled the situation, that's what helped strengthen me [Josh]. ... It was obviously time for me to end the using [of drugs]."

In coming to faith, Hamilton obtained new loves and a new life with new priorities: his relationship with God, his sobriety and his family are first. Then baseball and other things. His toughest, roughest days, God willing, are behind him.²¹ "Wrong Way" Hamilton had lost his bearings, and was heading in the wrong direction. But then found out that Jesus was the way home.

We all need to discover this as well. Nashville singer-song writer Kate Campbell captures the invitation to do so nicely in her provocative song, "The Way Home."

If you're ever in the Richmond jail
With no one around to go your bail
If you've lost your way it might help to know
Jesus is the way home.

If you're trying to put that whiskey down
And you realize you're losing ground
You don't have to walk that road alone
Jesus is the way home.

You don't have to worry where you're at
Or why you're there, He knows all that
You just let the Good Book be your map
Jesus is the way home.

If you think nobody understands

²¹ Jean-Jacques Taylor, "Lending a Hand: Hamilton was able to quit with help of wife, who never quit believing in him," *The Dallas Morning News*, Monday, June 2, 2008, pp. C1, 8.

And life's not going like you planned
There's a friend who'll show you how to go
Jesus is the way home.

There's a garden down in Alabam'
Not too far south of Birmingham
Painted signs and crosses by the road
One says Jesus is the way home .

For the Bible tells me so
Jesus is the way home.²²

²² Kate Campbell with Walt Aldridge, "The Way Home," from the CD *Monuments*, Large River Music, 2002.