



## Knowing my Value Finding True Happiness

Everyone wants to be happy. It is the ultimate goal of almost everything we do. But not every kind of happiness is 'created equal'. Some things make us feel good for a brief moment, like the taste of our favorite foods or the thrill of a high score in a video game. Other kinds of happiness go a little deeper, like being invited to the coolest party of the year or even winning a scholarship to college. But even these are not the deepest desires of our hearts and they will never fully satisfy us.

In fact, pursuing them will often lead us on a rollercoaster of ups and downs, full of anxiety and disappointment. If we want lasting happiness, we will need to seek "higher things".

***"It is Jesus that you seek when you dream of happiness. He is waiting for you when nothing else you find satisfies you." - Pope St. John Paul II***

## The Four Levels of Happiness

According to the system of Fr. Robert Spitzer S.J, all the desires of the human heart fit into one or more of the four different categories or levels:

### Level 1: Physical Pleasure

The first level corresponds to the desire for *physical pleasure*, things that can give immediate enjoyment and gratification. Examples might be a good night's sleep, putting on a jacket when you are cold, or enjoying your favorite ice-cream flavor. Think - maximum pleasure and minimum pain. The only person you are worried about at this level is yourself, the comfort and happiness of your own body.

**The Upside:** It is easy to find Level 1 happiness. All that is necessary is to pay attention to the wants of your body and fulfill them.

**The Downside:** This happiness is like a firework – it is great while it lasts, but it is over quickly. There is no lasting effect except perhaps a fleeting memory. We end up constantly looking for the next fix, and too much of certain pleasures can become addictive or harmful to us.

### Level 2: Ego-Gratification

The second level of happiness corresponds to the desire for “*ego-gratification*”, or feeling good about oneself by achieving success or popularity. Examples might be getting an A+ in math class or when your social media post is liked by the most popular girl in school. These desires bring your attention outside of physical needs in order to notice how you are measuring up to other people and how other people are receiving you. It is driven by competition and the goal is a sense of personal pride.

**The Upside:** Desires for success can help motivate us to be better. It is why we spend time practicing the tuba or training for a track meet. Students study harder and learn more because of the competition to get the best grades. The desire to be “liked” also makes us want to be more agreeable to other people - to be polite, wear deodorant and consider the needs of others.

**The Downside:** Healthy competition can be a good motivator, but competition as the main theme of life is a sad and lonely road. If our happiness rests solely on our “ego”, we end up viewing everyone we meet as a potential rival or simply as a means to an end. Success sets up higher and higher expectations and, instead of being a learning experience, failure can send one's

self-esteem plummeting. Making Level 2 the primary goal of our life will lead us on a roller coaster of highs and lows.

### Level 3: Good Beyond Self

The third level of happiness is the desire for good *beyond self*, making a worthwhile contribution to others and to our world. Examples might be helping a friend ace her test or hosting a diaper drive for mothers in need. Level 3 happiness seeks to build meaningful relationships, contribute to one's community, and bring peace, justice and love to the world. The focus shifts from seeing other people as mere competitors or conquests, to seeing other people as good and worthy of genuine love.

**The Upside:** Focusing on other people gives us purpose and brings real joy to our lives. Human beings long to be in relationship and to make a meaningful impact on the world. The happiness that comes from fulfilling these desires takes more effort to achieve, but it lasts much longer and is deeper and richer than that of Level 1 or Level 2.

**The Downside:** There can be a tendency in pursuing Level 3 happiness to make people, projects, or causes into the ultimate good in one's life. This is dangerous, as no human person, project, or group is perfect. Disappointment awaits those who place all hope of happiness in an organization or cause or even in a spouse or a child– nothing in this world will ever completely satisfy us.

### Level 4: The Transcendent

The fourth level of happiness comes from the desire for the *transcendent*, ultimately for God. Beyond the pleasure of the body, beyond the pride of the ego, and even beyond the desire to do good in the world, there is the pursuit of infinite Goodness, Beauty, Justice, Love, and Truth. This is the ultimate happiness, so called because it “transcends”, or goes beyond, what we can see and know clearly in this world.

Examples of tasting this kind of happiness might be an encounter with God on a retreat or a glorious sunset that lifts your heart to the sublime. Although some people do not consciously recognize these desires in themselves, nevertheless every human being made in the likeness of God has them. Even many seemingly contented atheists who live squarely in Level 3 may have moments of encounter with the Divine on Level 4 without realizing it. But the truth is, we will never be satisfied until these desires are completely fulfilled.

**The Upside:** The good news is “God Is”. He is the only One who can fulfill our insatiable desires for the transcendent. But He also desires to know and to love us, and to be known and loved by us. For those with faith, the God we are searching for is waiting in plain sight to be found!

**The Downside:** Those who live without faith must be content to always be seeking what they vaguely sense is the object of their desire and never quite reaching it. Because spiritual joys are mysterious and not always "emotionally" satisfying, some people miss pursuing this level of happiness altogether. Like Level 3 happiness, seeking this kind of happiness often requires sacrificing desires on the lower levels. It will take faith on our part, and a conscious calling of ourselves to go higher, but the reward is worth it – eternal happiness.



## Finding Happiness

Many of us spend the majority of our time and effort seeking happiness Level 1 and Level 2. These provide us with intense, short-term happiness, but do not come close to the longer-lasting and deeper happiness of Level 3 and 4. While it is worth noting that the same desire can sometimes fit into multiple levels simultaneously, missing out on the higher levels is a recipe for an unfulfilled, unhappy life. At World Youth Day in 2000, Pope St. John Paul II gave young people the formula for true happiness:

*“It is Jesus that you seek when you dream of happiness; he is waiting for you when nothing else you find satisfies you; he is the beauty to which you are so attracted; it is he who provokes you with that thirst for fullness that will not let you settle for compromise; it is he who urges you to shed the masks of a false life; it is he who reads in your hearts your most genuine choices, the choices that others try to stifle. It is Jesus who stirs in you the desire to do something great with your lives, the will to follow an ideal, the refusal to allow yourselves to be grounded down by mediocrity, the courage to commit yourselves humbly and patiently to improving yourselves and society, making the world more human and more fraternal.” –Pope St. John Paul II*

## Activity:

- Name 10 things you want, but don't yet have (at least not at this moment), that you believe would make you happy?

Label each desire/pleasure with one (or more) of the four levels of happiness. Remember some desires may fulfill more than one level of happiness. (e.g. *volunteering at homeless shelter does good for others but it also looks good on my resume/college application*)

- What level(s) of happiness do you spend most of your time seeking?
- What are some ways to find Level 3 and 4 happiness in your life today?



## *So what if I don't feel happy?*

Sometimes we feel unhappy; this doesn't make you a selfish or egotistical person. It's normal to experience sadness, anxiety, loneliness, and suffering. Being human means that we have feelings in response to things that we do, that happen around us, or that are going on in the larger world. It is natural to desire fulfillment on every level of happiness, especially with images of happiness and success flooding us through all forms of media. However, fulfilling every desire we experience just isn't possible (or advisable) in this world.

God created us for a specific purpose, both to make a meaningful contribution to others (Level 3) and to be in a relationship with Him forever (Level 4). The more we seek these higher levels of fulfillment in our lives, the more we will experience true joy.

But, as human beings created in God's image, we will still have difficult and painful experiences. Sometimes God allows us to be unfulfilled on the lower levels of our desire so that we learn and grow from our experience. He doesn't want us to get stuck there, but instead keep reaching higher.

Nevertheless, at times the pain or struggle can feel so great that a person may even think that life isn't worth living. Death may falsely appear as an escape from the cycle of unsatisfying, short-term happiness.

**But every life is sacred.** It belongs to God and our ultimate (Level 4) happiness will not be served by rejecting His plan for us. God will not call us home until we have completed our mission and it not for us to decide when that moment will come.

Suicidal thoughts can cloud our vision and make it difficult to clearly recognize the places where happiness is or can be in our lives. It could be in the smile you receive from someone in your class that you don't know too well. It could be in a conversation with the cashier at the checkout or with the hug from your grandparent. Happiness may be hiding in the quiet moment that you have to yourself when you're just falling off to sleep at night.

If you are struggling with negative thoughts or feelings, and especially thoughts of self-harm, the best thing you can do is reach out for help from someone you trust. Talk to any adult that really listens to you, that cares about you. They want you to be happy and safe. Because they care about you -- be it your friend, teacher, counsellor, or parent -- they will share your burden and suffering. This is a way for them to love you; they want to help you discover the joy that is waiting for you in your life. Letting yourself be loved is a source of lasting happiness for them!



Suicide can be a challenging topic for everyone, but please remember these resources for anyone suffering from depression or having thoughts of suicide:

For immediate, free, and confidential help  
(for you, or for a friend):

**Call, Text or Chat "9-8-8"**

This national crisis hotline works from any phone and will connect you with a trained counsellor who can address your immediate needs as well as provide you with local on-going care. It's also great to reach out to the hotline for advice if you are worried about the mental health of someone you know.

## Raise the Happiness Level Activity:

Identify the desires in each of the below scenarios, and to which level(s) of happiness they belong. Determine why the given character(s) might be in crisis or unhappy, and develop a change of perspective or attitude, or an alternative course of action, that may help them to find more fulfilling happiness.

- It is a Thursday night and Jordyn has homework. However, her mom has to go out for a couple of hours and has asked her to watch her little brothers, who are 5 and 7 years old. Jordyn is upset because instead of finishing her homework and watching her new favorite series on Netflix, she now has to make dinner for her little brothers and get them ready for bed. After being cross with her brothers for eating too slowly and then making a mess while cleaning up, Jordyn rushes through a few children's stories while her brothers squirm and want to play. Then she wrestles them into their pajamas and threatens to tell Mom if they make one more sound. Exhausted, she has just collapsed onto the couch to begin her homework when her mother comes home and asks, "How did it go?"
- Basketball is Mario's life. He has been playing since he could walk, dribbling a tiny basketball around on the neighborhood court while his older cousins played pick-up ball. In high school, he comes to school early enough to take 500 shots before the first bell rings. He is known in his classes as the basketball guy. Other guys in the school have started showing up in the mornings to work on their shot with him, and he enjoys helping them get better at the game. This year, in an off-season workout, Mario broke his ankle. He was devastated. The school policy is that athletes who cannot participate in try-outs for any of the sports are not permitted to be on the team. The 8-week recovery had Mario on the bench for try-outs, and beg as he might, the policy stood. Now Mario is watching his friends from the sidelines when he can bring himself to go to a game, but mostly he is angry and moping around at school or at home. He can't focus in class, he is short with his friends and rude to his teachers, and he has taken to drinking on the weekends to distract himself from not being able to play ball, and lying to his parents about what he is up to. Life is falling apart for Mario, but he can't see a way out.
- Becca and Tess are best friends. They are in every class together except for 3<sup>rd</sup> period, when they meet at the water fountain halfway through their respective classes just to check in. They have a shared TikTok account, and their videos have been gaining in popularity, to both of their delights. Another of their friends has an idea for a video series about the football season, and wants to post the videos on Becca and Tess's TikTok. Tess is excited, because she loves football and knows that the whole school would watch the videos. Becca feels like they are being used for her video-editing skills and she and Tess's popularity, and doesn't think that football relates at all to anything they have done so far; she definitely does not want to do the football series. Their other friend keeps pushing them and telling them it would gain them a ton of followers and also boost school spirit for the football season. Tess agrees. Becca thinks doing the series would be selling out. Now their other friends are taking sides, and both girls are feeling pressure. Everywhere they go, the football TikTok series is a topic of conversation, and lunchtime is becoming unbearable. As they sit together in most classes, they are finding it tough to focus in class, and both girls keep finding excuses not to meet during 3<sup>rd</sup> period. It feels like there is an icy wall between them, and each girl is finding it difficult to think about anything except the fact that she is losing her best friend, and over something dumb. But neither will say anything.

