

KNOWING MY VALUE

GRADES 7-9 – Lesson III

Goal:

To recognize that God created us out of infinite love, for our true happiness. To gain tools to overcome temptations to sadness, despair and even suicide by learning what real happiness is.

Lesson:

Everyone wants to be happy. Almost everything we do is ultimately directed at achieving some goal that we believe will make us happy. But not every kind of happiness is created equal. As human beings we have desires for **four different levels of happiness**:

1. Physical or material pleasure (e.g.: ice-cream, nap, sunbathing)

Upside: relatively easy to get (instant gratification)

Downside: good feelings fade fast; constantly looking for the next fix
too much can be addictive/harmful

2. Achieving success/being admired (e.g. winning a game, good grades, being popular)

Upside: pushes us to work harder; accomplish remarkable things

Downside: life can become an endless exhausting competition; success is fleeting,
failure can be discouraging; self-esteem based on comparison is very fragile

3. Good beyond Self (e.g. being a good friend, helping at home, volunteering)

Upside: gives life deeper purpose; a meaningful, lasting contribution to the world

Downside: we can't control other people's reactions; human relations never fully satisfy; we can't solve all the world's problems

4. Ultimate Good (e.g. spiritual fulfillment; relationship with God)

Upside: satisfies the deepest longings of our heart, lasts *forever*

Downside: because spiritual joys are mysterious and not always "emotionally" satisfying, some people miss this level of happiness altogether

Most of us spend a lot of our time and energy seeking the first two levels of happiness. These kinds of happiness are good and important, but often the thrill fades quickly resulting in a rollercoaster of ups and downs, always looking for the "next thing". Level 3 and 4 happiness are the only kinds that bring long-lasting fulfillment. The more we seek to fulfil these kinds of desires, the more genuinely happy we will be. (See [Fr. Spitzer](#) for a fuller treatment of this topic)

Activity: What makes me happy?

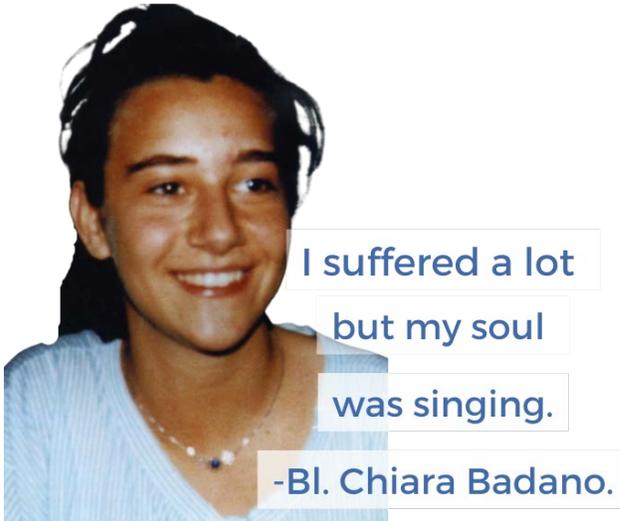
Watch:

[Are you happy?](#)

- Make a list of at least 10 things that make you happy (anything goes –chocolate, hanging out with friends, helping your little sister)
- Make a list of at least 10 things you believe would make you happy if you had them/did them (you can think about right now or sometime in the future)
- Ask yourself, why do these things make you happy? Why do you believe the things you want, but don't yet have, would make you happy? Be honest. Label each desire/pleasure with one (or more) of the four levels of happiness. *Some activities 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)*
- Make a list of things that you worry about or that make you unhappy.
- We may worry because we are afraid of losing or never getting something good that we expect will make us happy. These could be things (such as a new iPhone) or status (our place among peers; grades; conflicts with others). Label your anxieties with the level(s) of happiness they correspond to.

Discussion:

- What level(s) of happiness do you spend most of your time seeking?
- Do you think the famous movie and pop stars you see in the news are happy? Why or why not?
- What are some ways to find Level 3 and 4 happiness in your life today?



Watch:

[The Life of Blessed Chiara Badano](#)

Discussion:

- Was Bl. Chiara happy?
- During her illness, did Chiara always attain Level 1 or Level 2 happiness?
- What gave her such immense joy?

What if I don't feel happy?

Does that mean I'm a selfish or egotistical person? No! It's normal to experience sadness, anxiety, loneliness and suffering at times. 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. And, as we are human beings, 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 humans 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 wants us to keep reaching higher. However, at times the pain or struggle can feel so great that a person may even think that life isn't worth living. 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. Or, in the brief conversation with the crossing guard on the way to school. 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. But, 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!"

For this topic, you may find it helpful to show Cardinal Dolan's video message on [Knowing Your Value](#).

Watch: [Cardinal Dolan: Knowing Your Value](#)
(Password = **ADNY**)

Resources for Teachers and Parents

Helpguide.org information on [Teen Depression and Suicide](#). Valuable resource for parents and educators to understand symptoms and warning signs and know how to help.

[ADAP Suicide Prevention](#). A video training series to help parents and educators prevent suicide among youth.

[New York State Office of Mental Health](#) offers information on suicide prevention, including trainings, workshops, and learning modules:

The [Samaritans NYC](#) offer non-faith-based information on suicide: suicide prevention hotlines and also for “suicide survivors,” those who are left behind to sort through “what happened,”

[Solace House Suicide Prevention Center](#) (two NY locations: Long Island City, Queens; and Yonkers), to prevent suicide and also for suicide bereavement. (718) 482-0001;

Suicide can be a challenging topic for everyone, but please remember that help is always available (24/7) for anyone suffering from depression or having thoughts of suicide. For confidential guidance for your child, or anyone:

Call, text, or chat 9-8-8

Similar to 911, the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline is a national hotline that connects a caller in a mental health crisis to a trained counselor who can address their immediate needs (and even help connect them to ongoing care if they desire).