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HAPPINESS, SUFFERING, AND THE LOVE OF GOD

Study Guide

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Lesson One—The Four Levels of Happiness

Outline Summary

I. Series Introduction: What Happiness Means to You



Episode Timecode

1:08

The Mystery of Unhappiness

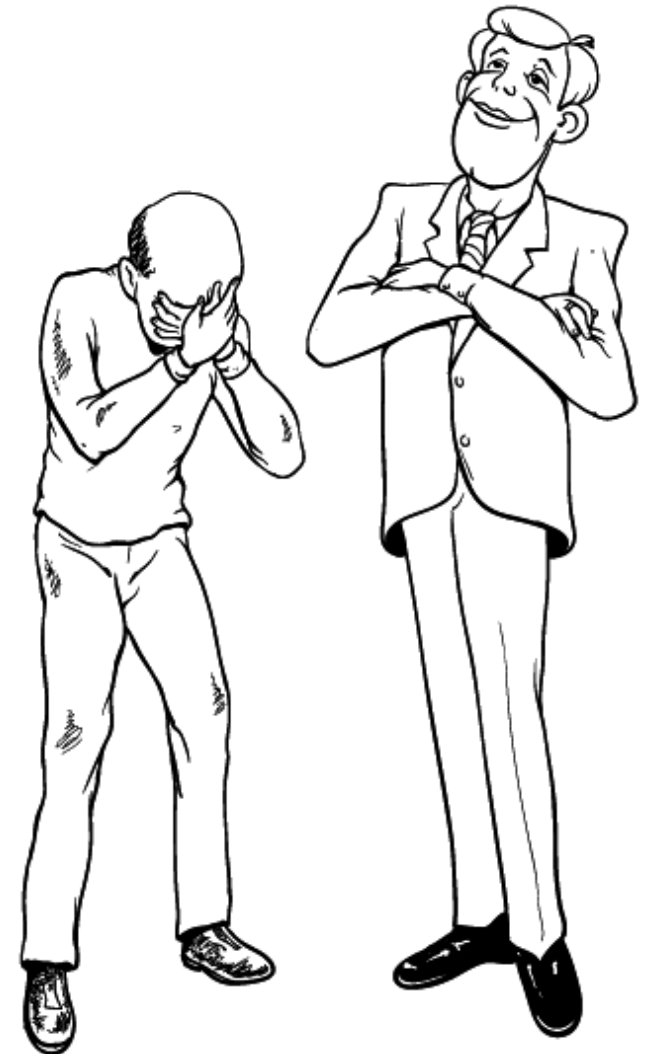
What does it take to be happy?

Sometimes people seem to have everything they could ever want, but they are still unhappy. Maybe you or someone you know has desired something for a long time, but then—unexpectedly—still felt empty after getting it.

We all want to avoid being unhappy, but often we don't seem to know how—or, since we live in a world with evil and suffering, if it's even possible.

It's strange that we need happiness so much and can still know so little about what it is. This series is dedicated to helping you understand more deeply what happiness is and examine how you are pursuing happiness in your own life.

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Lesson One—The Four Levels of Happiness



Episode Timecode

2:39

The Importance of Happiness

Even when we may not know how to find happiness, we know we need it.

Humankind has always been preoccupied with the search for happiness. From the beginning of history, virtually every philosopher from Plato and Aristotle to modern scientists such as Albert Einstein have held up happiness as one of the most important things that we can reflect on in life.

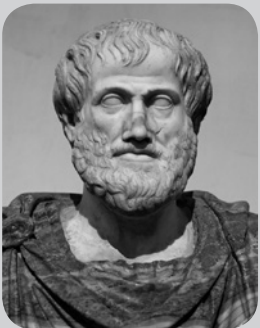
Why? Because everything else in our life depends on it. As Aristotle explains, "Happiness is the one thing you can choose for itself; everything else is chosen for the sake of happiness."



Plato
(428–347 B.C.)

Greek philosopher

One of the earliest, most influential thinkers of Western Civilization, he founded one of its first schools, the Academy. His best-known works are his *Dialogues* and the *Republic*.



Aristotle
(384–322 B.C.)

Greek philosopher

A student of Plato, his many writings laid the foundation for subjects as varied as biology and theater, aesthetics and physics, ethics and linguistics. His study of happiness is found in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

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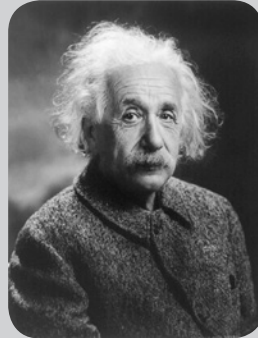
Lesson One–The Four Levels of Happiness



Albert Einstein
(1879–1955)

Groundbreaking 20th-century theorist and scientist

His investigations into the nature of the universe produced such landmarks as the theory of relativity and the theory of matter-energy equivalence (source of the famous equation $E=mc^2$).



NOTES



PHILOSOPHY (FROM GREEK, “LOVE OF WISDOM”):

The study of the most fundamental realities, such as the meaning of existence and the nature of consciousness, by systematic thought.



PSYCHOLOGY (FROM GREEK, “STUDY OF THE SOUL”):

The science of the mind; investigating how the mind works and how to foster mental health.



ANTHROPOLOGY (FROM GREEK, “STUDY OF MAN”):

The study of human beings through science, history, and culture.



THEOLOGY (FROM GREEK, “STUDY OF GOD”):

The study of God and by extension the study of religious truths and supernatural realities (e.g., angels, Purgatory, the Incarnation).

“Happiness is the **one** thing you can choose for itself; **everything else** is chosen for the sake of happiness.”

– Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*

Lesson One—The Four Levels of Happiness

Happiness and Life Goals

Since happiness is the only thing chosen for itself, that means that our happiness will be the main goal that shapes every other decision in our life.

All of our life goals are steps to that ultimate destination. From whom we marry to what we eat for breakfast, every choice in our life is aiming at that one final result—the happy version of you.







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- How Happiness Influences Our Life:**
- What We Strive For
 - The Friendships We Make
 - The Careers We Pursue
 - The Person We Marry
 - The Legacy We Leave

II. Series Overview: The Four Levels of Happiness

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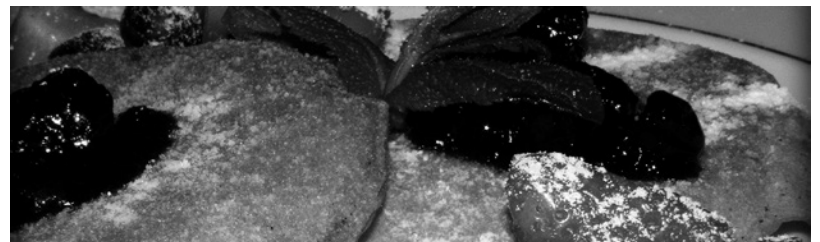
The Four Levels of Happiness:

-  1. Pleasure (*Laetus*)
-  2. Success (*Felix*)
-  3. Making a Difference (*Beatus*)
-  4. Transcendence (*Sublimitas*)

Level 1—Pleasure

 Episode Timecode **5:03**

The first level is pleasure, which comes from external things. Many of these pleasures come from satisfying our physical needs such as food, clothing, or shelter, and they fade quickly once the need is met.



Lesson One—The Four Levels of Happiness

Level 2—Success



Episode Timecode
7:02

The second level goes beyond the external senses to an internal sense of self. How do I measure up to others?

EGO-CENTRIC
Believing that everything in the outside world revolves around oneself. Ego-centric people do not recognize the importance, feelings, or perspectives of others.

Ego-Comparative: Inner World vs. Outer World

We are aware first of ourselves and then of the world around us.

Ego-comparative happiness is when we compare ourselves (*ego* = self) to others and judge that we are better.

Achievement, Status, Popularity

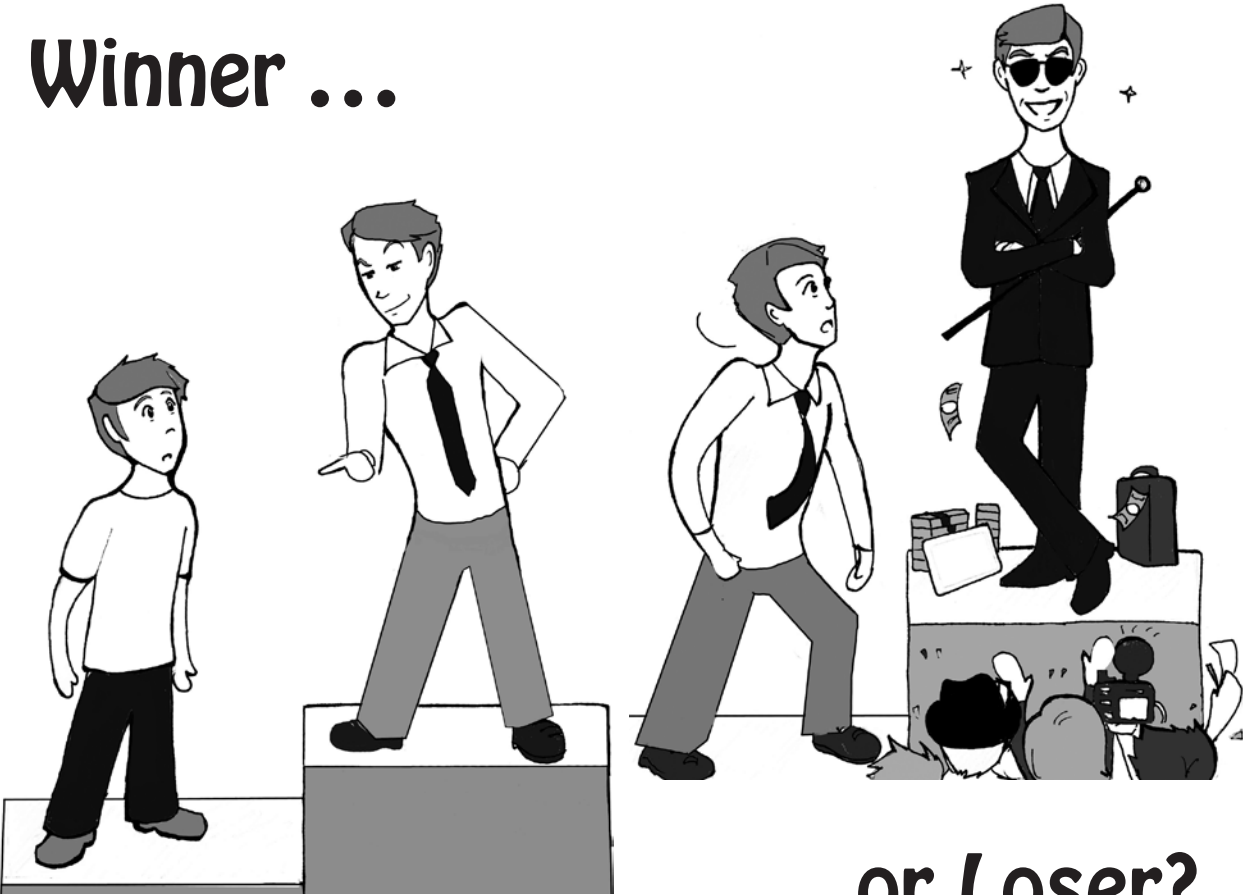
The main ways we can rank ourselves against other people are through these:

- **Achievements:** Harvard Graduate, State Wrestling Champ, Gold Medalist, Valedictorian, Academy Award Winner, Guinness World Record for Sweater-Knitting
- **Status:** Vice-President of a Fortune 500 Company, Head Cheerleader, Town Council, U.N. Council, Seat at the Cool Kids Table
- **Popularity:** Most Friends, Most Online "Friends", Starring Role in the Play

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The Comparison Game

Winner ...



... or Loser?

Winners and Losers

Comparisons with others means that for you to be a “winner” you need to be better than other people—who thus have to be “losers”.

Many people who focus on comparisons will find themselves uncomfortably in the middle, better than some people but not as good as others.

Are they winners or losers, then?

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Lesson One—The Four Levels of Happiness

The Need for More—Competition and Unhappiness

With so many people in the world, a need to exceed others can never be completed: you will always need to be more, and what you have will never be enough.

You can't enjoy being the best, since it's always threatened by fear that someone better could turn up. This is how many apparently successful people can be so unhappy and even self-destructive.

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“The person who dies with the most toys, wins.”

— Popular expression of Level 2 focus

Lesson One—The Four Levels of Happiness

“The true meaning of life is to be discovered **in the world** rather than **within man** or his own [mind], as though it were a closed system ...

The **more one forgets himself**—by giving himself to a *cause to serve* or another *person to love*—the **more human he is.**”

—Victor Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning*

Not a Competition

Bringing more goodness into the world is satisfying in itself, rather than for the success it brings.

Yet, people can sometimes turn this into a Comparison Game: “I did more good than you did, therefore my life is better than yours”, which reintroduces Level 2 and all its insecurity.

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Lesson One—The Four Levels of Happiness

Giving Your Best vs. Being Better

So how can Level 3 be different? Instead of asking, “Am I better than others?”, the contributive drive in Level 3 makes us ask, “Did I use whatever I had to do as much good as I could?”

The happiness that comes from doing as much good with our lives as we can isn’t threatened by whether others can do more or less.



Viktor Frankl
(1905–1997)

Psychiatrist and philosopher

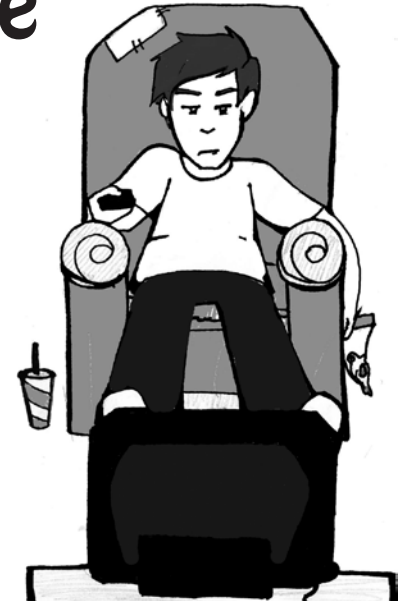
Best known for his 1946 book, *Man’s Search for Meaning*, detailing his own experience in the Nazi concentration camps and the search for purpose in existence even under the darkest conditions.



Contributive Happiness



vs.



- Doing
- Being With

- Disengaged
- Loneliness

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Lesson One—The Four Levels of Happiness

Level 4—Transcendence: Our Purpose Beyond the World



Episode Timecode
13:53

Level 3 moves us to bring goodness into the world. Level 4 stirs us with the sense that we are destined for a goodness that goes beyond this world, that transcends it.

The Heart's Desire Beyond the World.

The stirring of the heart that we are destined for something more is found in art and literature throughout history.

An early famous instance is Saint Augustine's *Confessions*, written 1,600 years ago, which described his own journey toward happiness and stated that we have certain desires for perfect things that can't be satisfied by the imperfect things in our world.

The Five Transcendent Desires

From our earliest childhood, we have an instinctive desire for perfect truth, perfect love, perfect goodness or justice, perfect beauty, and perfect home.

When we see a beautiful face or flower fading with time, when we lose a friend or have to leave a home that has made us feel loved and secure—these imperfect experiences leave us with a desire for a perfect, unending kind of experience.

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TRANSCENDENT DESIRES

Desires that are shared by everyone and, because they are so universal, rise above (or “transcend”) the differences of culture, time, country, etc., that separate people.

Lesson One – The Four Levels of Happiness


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The Quest for the Perfect

The realization that everything in the world is imperfect, including ourselves, means that our quest for perfection must lead us somewhere outside of ourselves and even beyond the world.

This is what led Saint Augustine to pursue God, saying, “For Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee.”



 **Saint Augustine**
(354-430)

Catholic bishop whose influential writings on theology earned him the title “Doctor of the Church”
He narrates his own conversion from a life of sin and pleasure to a life devoted to God in his *Confessions* (written in 398).

The Five Transcendent Desires

- Truth
- Love
- Goodness/Justice
- Beauty
- Home

Lesson One—The Four Levels of Happiness

Invitation from God

Saint Augustine's quotation illustrates that this desire for perfection comes from an awareness in our hearts that there is something greater out there, and the awareness moves us to seek it out.

He believed that this awareness itself comes from God, who is inviting us to find our transcendent purpose.



TRINITY

The Christian teaching that there is only One God in Three Persons (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). Most Christian faiths share this belief and regard it as a profound mystery.



SACRAMENTS (FROM LATIN, "MADE HOLY")

In the Catholic Church, the sacraments are visible rituals that are channels through which God confers his presence and his grace to people.

"For Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee."

—Saint Augustine, *The Confessions*

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III. Conclusion: Our Experience of Happiness

Do You Recognize the Four Levels of Happiness?



Episode Timecode

18:50

When you think of your own idea of happiness, does it match up with something from one or more of the four levels?

Are the desires of each level familiar to you?

How Have You Experienced Happiness in Your Own Life?

Our English language uses one word for all of them, but understanding the distinctions between the four levels can transform how we look at our own experiences of happiness.

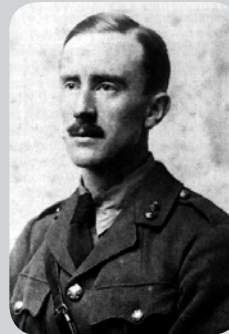
In future lessons we will explore how the different levels work together: sometimes we can encounter different levels of happiness in the same experience, and in other experiences we can find different levels giving us competing impulses.



J. R. R. Tolkien
(1892–1973)

Linguist and author

His fantasies about Middle-Earth, including *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*, depict ordinary people who are sent out into a world full of extraordinary wonders and are caught up in epic moral conflicts.



C. S. Lewis
(1898–1963)

Writer and scholar

Famous both for his novels and for his nonfiction books on Christianity, he wrote fiction that often deals with people encountering timeless spiritual truths in a world beyond our own, in fantasy (*The Chronicles of Narnia*) as well as in science fiction (*The Space Trilogy*).



Lesson One—The Four Levels of Happiness



SMALL GROUP REFLECTION & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why are some people unhappy and happy at the same time—full and empty, fulfilled and unfulfilled?
2. Why do some teenagers who have great potential have suicidal feelings?
3. Why do some extremely gifted people resent so deeply the little successes of people who do not have nearly as much—and even belittle those successes?
4. Why do we sometimes move from a sense of superiority and contempt to a sense of inferiority and fear over the course of just a few minutes?
5. Why do some people who have every imaginable form of giftedness and success drink or drug themselves into oblivion and failure?
6. What does happiness mean to you?
7. What is a life goal that you have chosen based on your idea of happiness?
8. What is a choice you often face that forces you to pick between two different levels of happiness?
9. Can you recall a specific moment in your life where you felt a transcendent desire, something more than the world could offer?

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