

The Four Levels of Happiness – condensed from *Healing the Culture*, Robert Spitzer, PhD -

Everyone wants to be happy, free from unnecessary constraints, able to do whatever we want as long as we do not hurt anyone else.

But happiness, even in western democratic countries, can be very tricky, as getting whatever we want can be a curse, a lesson many people never learn. So, as mentioned in the USA's Declaration of Independence, Americans clamor after life, liberty (freedom constraint) and happiness.

According to Robert Spitzer, PhD, Spitzer, President of the Magis Institute and former President of Gonzaga University, in his book *Healing the Culture*, there are four basic levels of happiness. There is a catch, however, but that will reveal itself by the by.

With Dr. Spitzer's permission, John Patrick, MD of Ottawa, Canada, former professor of Pediatrics and Biochemistry at the University of Ottawa, has distilled the core theme of Spitzer's book into the following short presentation, making it easier for all to understand and to convey to others as we converse with various in myriad settings. What follows is my take on JP's version, though I have read Spitzer's book, too.

Snapshot View:

Happiness 1 – Animal Happiness	unHappiness 1 – the abuse of Animal Happiness
Happiness 2 – Mind, Skill, Education	unHappiness 2 – Envy & Comparisons
Happiness 3 – People, Serving, Ministering	unHappiness 3 – Expecting Reciprocity
Happiness 4 – Loving God	

Happiness One

Dr. John calls level one 'animal happiness.' This level focuses on the basic needs we have as human beings, including food, drink, sex and rest. John's brother raises Black Angus cattle on his ranch. The cattle could push over any fence at any time they might prefer, but they are all quite happy as long as they have sufficient food, water and an occasional bull. The bull is a bit more demanding, but as long as the cows are not too far away, he stays put, also.

God gave us the gifts and the ability to enjoy good food, drink, sex and rest and intends for us to indulge at proper levels and to give him thanks in return. As with any gift, any good thing, there exists a corresponding temptation to abuse the goods.

As with Adam and Eve, we think we know better than God, desiring to have as much of God's gifts without limitation or restriction. These abuses result in unhappiness. Our country resounds with unhappiness as many abuse all four of these divine gifts.

unHappiness One

Overeating, indulging without limits, gorging ourselves on unhealthy foods, eating and drinking anything we wish at will has produced the epidemic of obesity in America, where one in three people are clinically obese (more than 30% overweight). When I was in grade school in the 1950's, I imagine that less than one percent of the population was obese. Consider that in 1986, just 25 five years ago, less than ten percent of Americans were obese! In 2009, three times more Americans were more than 30% over weight, and a good many of those exceed 100 pounds over their recommended weight!

Abusing alcohol has resulted in similar levels of drunkenness, sexual and physical abuse, which in turn has destroyed the lives of individuals and families, and killing tens of thousands of people while driving cars under the influence of drugs and alcohol.

The abuse of sex? The disintegration of marriage? The scourge of pornography?
Where do I start?

12% of all websites are pornographic. 19% of all hits on the internet are searching for porn.

Did you know:

- There are 104 million unmarried Americans, representing over 45% of the adult population (ACS, 2008). God made the bulk of us to marry.
- Since 2005, the majority of US households have been headed by unmarried couples. The number of non-married-couple households continues to grow (ACS 2005-2007).
- There are more than 51 million households headed by unmarried Americans, representing roughly 44% of all households and the majority of households in 23 states, plus the District of Columbia (CPS, 2007).

In fact, unmarried people are probably more common than you would expect. Increasingly more adults today are living unmarried lifestyles...

- There are more than 31 million one-person households in the U.S., representing roughly 27% of all households (CPS, 2007).
- As of 2000, this was the most common household type (Frank Hobbs, 2005).
- The number of cohabiting unmarried partners increased by 88% between 1990-2007 (CPS 2007).
- The majority of couples marrying today cohabited first (Larry Bumpass and Hsien-Hen Lu, 2000).

...while increasingly more children today are living with unmarried parents:

- 39.7% of all births are to unmarried women (CDC, 2007).
- Nearly 40% of different-sex, unmarried American households include children (CPS, 2007).
- 41% of first births by unmarried women are born to cohabiting partners (Larry Bumpass and Hsien-Hen Lu, 2000).
- About two-fifths of children are expected to live in a cohabiting household at some point (Census, 2000).

Keep in mind that many of these stats are 10 years old. They are not better today. They are getting worse all the time.

And this omits the topic of homosexual sex. Unless one lives under a rock, everyone knows something of the changes in America and Western Europe in this arena - and it isn't good.

The abuse of Happiness One carries with it severe penalties as we are all tempted to make unhealthy decisions, substituting wise choices for foolish ones, the unintended for the intended. Daily these basic needs confronted us, God given needs and just as often unwise substitutions seduce us, and we, thinking we know better than God, often choose what we think will make us truly happy, to our shame and often demise.

Once embroiled in unHappiness One, the only way out requires us to recognize the foolishness of abusing the basic gifts God has given us, and to improve one's mind, to make better choices, to pursue an education, to improve one's skills in a trade, and to work harder to improve one's situation. (Sadly, though many seek to better themselves through hard work and education, they continue to remain embroiled in unHappiness One.)

Happiness Two

Improving oneself can result in rectifying level one abuses, at least in part.

Seeking to improve oneself, to increase one's skills, education, mind and employment status is a God-given response to the creation mandate. We all know that to move on in life, we must work hard, improve our skills in a trade or on the farm, to pursue an education and to sharpen our minds. In oppressive regimes, the lack of opportunity for improvement, preventing the opportunity to better one's situation corresponding to the effort invested, directly impacts the will to improve.

Clearly, many westerners have taken advantage of educational opportunities, and the prospects that capitalism has provided have produced great wealth for many who have invested their time and energy. Education alone has resulted in a more worthwhile and enjoyable life of interaction with other people regardless of the level of corresponding wealth.

Early in the book of Genesis, God instructed man to work hard, to subdue the world, to rule and steward it wisely. So, hard work and a proper education, and increasing one's education and skill in order to fulfill the creation mandate produces good things, happiness two, for which we thank our Creator.

unHappiness Two

But as with the abuse of animal happiness on the first level, many people abuse this level of happiness by considering people around them stepping stones to propel them ahead of everyone else. Greed, materialism, idolatry, jealousy and envy have seduced many to abuse the gifts of work and education to the point that they worship the false gods of mammon and self. They are so unhappy and so disillusioned that they can't sense that even as they work harder, they invest their efforts in the wrong direction, often wondering why they are so unhappy.

The only way out of unHappiness Two is to move onto Happiness Three, serving other people, investing in the lives of others, selflessly giving without an expectation of reciprocity.

Happiness Three

People who take this step from level two to three make a monumental transition from self-orientation to other-orientation. Traps line this path, too, but we'll address those issues in the next section.

Other-orientation requires a focus outward rather than inward. The paradigm shift required to make this transformation comes not quickly, but rather accompanies maturation and a corresponding level of healthy self-esteem. To the degree that one turns one's focus outward results in corresponding happiness to the giver. The greater the shift, the greater the gain, validating the adage "It is better to give than to receive."

A lack of maturity prevents many from ever fully taking this step of reorientation from level two to three, though many appear to make this adjustment, as roles are thrust upon us as we move through life, including children, co-workers, relatives. . . . relationships in which we develop coping skills that may give the appearance that we willingly serve other people, when in reality, we are still very much self-oriented.

unHappiness Three

When we take on certain relational roles in life or they are suddenly thrust upon us, if we have made the orientation shift from self to others, we truly experience happiness as we have learned the seemingly counter intuitive secret that serving others eclipses being served. But if we have not learned this lesson, not having truly altered our focus, we stand to suffer disappointment and loss as those relationships usually come to a disappointing end, or at least morph greatly as children leave home, or they sadly disappoint us, and co-workers, friends & relatives let us down, or betray us or move or die.

If we served them with a need love, a motive to receive as much or more from them than we were giving, we will suffer unhappiness. Serving other people with a 'selfless' attitude does not accompany a sense of reciprocity. It is truly other oriented. But when one expects an a portion of payment in return, as small as the expectation of a thank you note, if not received, disappointment & discouragement can grow into resentment, resulting in profound unhappiness. And as with the lower levels of unhappiness, the only way out of unhappiness level 3 is to move to the next level.

Happiness Four

We experience and achieve agape love, the highest form of love only as we know God, as the Holy Spirit grows his fruit in our lives. Jesus instructed his followers to love even their enemies, and without his divine indwelling Spirit teaching us to obey to that degree, love on this level will elude us. But to submit to God and others as Christ submitted to his father, enduring the cross on our behalf, dying the death we were meant to die, (the death those who reject the offer of Christ's payment on their behalf will suffer), we, like

the apostle Paul, can joyfully endure suffering in the name of Christ. Much of what Paul wrote glimpses us this level of selfless happiness – for which, unlike the first three levels of happiness, there is no corresponding level of unhappiness.

Collect these level four stories. Write them down even if they are not your own. Use them as motivation to strive to submit joyfully to whatever circumstances God allows to enter our lives.

Michael McLaughlin, MDiv
CMDA Western Director
cmdawest@gmail.com
<http://cmdawestern.wordpress.com/>
<http://cmda.org>
503-522-1950