



Credible Catholic

CREDIBLE CATHOLIC

Little Book - Volume 13

FOUR LEVELS OF HAPPINESS



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**Credible Catholic Little Book
Volume Thirteen**

Four Levels of Happiness

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**This Volume supports The Catechism of the Catholic Church,
Part Three—Life in Christ**

NOTE: All teachings in the **Credible Catholic** materials conform to the **Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)** and help to explain the information found therein. **Father Spitzer** has also included materials intended to respond to current secular myths advocating atheism, agnosticism, and materialism. You will find credible documented evidence for God, our soul, and the resurrection of our Lord, Jesus Christ to bolster your faith.

Part One from the **CCC** is titled, **THE PROFESSION OF FAITH**. The first 5 volumes in the Credible Catholic Big Books and Credible Catholic Little Books fall into Part One. **Part Two** of the CCC is titled, **THE CELEBRATION OF THE CHRISTIAN MYSTERY**. This is covered in volumes 6 through 12. **Part Three** of the CCC is **LIFE IN CHRIST** and information related to this topic will be found in volumes 13 through 17. Credible Catholic Big and Little Books volumes 18 through 20 will cover **Part Four** of the CCC, **CHRISTIAN PRAYER**.

We all need to be Credible Catholics. St. Augustine said in his work, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*,

“Usually, even a non-Christian knows something about the earth, the heavens and other elements... Now, it is a disgraceful and dangerous thing for an infidel to hear a Christian, presumably giving the meaning of Holy Scripture, talking nonsense on these topics; ...If they find a Christian mistaken in a field which they themselves know well and hear him maintaining his foolish opinions about our books, how are they going to believe those books in matters concerning the resurrection of the dead, the hope of eternal life, and the kingdom of heaven...”

It is therefore incumbent upon us to use contemporary academically credible evidence to support Christian faith.

Please note: The following Table of Contents correlates with that of “The Big Book” (the much larger Compendium). If readers want fuller explanations, footnotes, original sources, and complete arguments, they need only click on that particular link (below), and they will be taken to it in “The Big Book.”

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Four Levels of Happiness

It may seem surprising to start our exploration of Christian moral life with a discussion of happiness. Perhaps on some level we might feel a tension between happiness and the moral life: I can pursue my own happiness or I can pursue what I “should” be doing.

Ultimately, happiness is what all of us desire. But there are different kinds of human desires, as we’ll see, and so the study of happiness provides a view into the human soul. How we direct our powers in the pursuit of our desires determines whether we are happy both on a day-to-day basis and in our lives overall. How we pursue happiness determines who we are—altruistic or narcissistic, loving or domineering, a worshiper of God or a worshiper of self.

And yet, for all the importance happiness plays in our lives, we may struggle to even explain what it is. We will begin with a definition of happiness and a breakdown of the four different kinds of happiness that correspond to the four basic categories of human desire. Then we’ll look at how these different kinds actually form levels of happiness, as well as how we can best integrate and move through these levels.

Once we understand how we can find fulfillment in life, we can then begin our survey of the Christian moral life. We’ll then see how the different paths offered by evil and by Jesus’ teaching on love, morality and faith are crucial to the question of our ultimate happiness.

Chapter One: Four Kinds of Happiness

Introduction

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Unhappiness seems to appear where we don’t expect it. So many times, it’s the friendly and loving people who feel lonely; the confident people who have hidden fears of rejection; the teens full of promise who harbor suicidal thoughts; the geniuses who obsess jealously over the smaller successes of others. The long-sought promotion or award or championship is finally won, and yet we feel empty again afterwards, sometimes in a matter of minutes. This element of surprise—I should be happy, so why aren’t I?—makes the unhappiness worse.

The reason for the surprise is that happiness is actually complex, because we are complex. Despite their best efforts, many people seem at least partially unaware of their

complex selves—selves that seek truth, fairness, love, beauty, home, creativity, and even transcendence—and so their expectations about what they need to be happy are often incomplete. This is not going to be an easy “how-to” chapter, as our search for happiness requires an exploration of that deeper self, and to do that a collection of aphorisms or advice would be insufficient.

But the search for happiness is worth that deeper effort. As Aristotle noted many centuries ago, happiness is the one thing that we can choose in and for itself—everything else we choose for the sake of happiness. Happiness is behind every action we take. Happiness is what determines whether or not we think of ourselves as successful or valuable, whether we think of our lives as meaningful and lived to the full-- or worthless and wasted. It shapes how we choose our friends, our career, our spouse.

So it's important to understand what it is.

I. A General Definition of Happiness

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The most general definition of happiness might be “the fulfillment of desire.” (Unhappiness is therefore “the non-fulfillment of desire.”) So what do we desire? What brings us happiness?

A diverse range of thinkers through the centuries—philosophers, theologians, psychologists and anthropologists—have identified four major kinds of desire, which give rise to four kinds of happiness.

DESIRE	COMES FROM OUR
1. Desires from biological opportunities and dangers	1. Brain and Senses
2. Ego-Comparative desires	2. Self-consciousness
3. Contributive-empathetic desires	3. Empathy and Conscience
4. Transcendental-spiritual desires	4. Transcendental awareness

Let's take a quick look at each one in turn.

II. The First Kind of Desire: External-Pleasure-Material

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Our brain and senses are instinctively tuned to respond to biological needs. We share these instincts with animals—instincts for survival (desires to acquire food/water and

shelter and avoid dangers like predators and poisonous foods) and for propagating the species (herd and pack behaviors, procreation, and in mammals even affection).

Interestingly, animals seem limited in their desires to these instinctive needs: you can observe with a pet that when its needs are met and no danger is present, it will simply go to sleep. For humans, on the other hand, this is the time when our minds turn to the other kinds of desire.

Of course, people can become fixated on the happiness coming from these physical sources—food, drink, comfort. The quest for material things—the nicest house and car and clothes, the finest foods—can become a fixation, but after a while, it is not enough to make us truly happy—and so we start looking for something more, moving into a second kind of desire: ego-comparative desire.

III. The Second Kind of Desire: Ego-Comparative

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As we learned in Volume 2, humans have self-consciousness, so even a simple sense experience has an added layer where we don't merely experience it, but also experience ourselves experiencing it. This self-consciousness has the effect of creating our own "inner world" distinct from the "outer world" where things happen. In fact, a necessary part of childhood development is learning that the outer world is independent of our own inner world, that it is in fact a shared world filled with other people, each with their own inner worlds just like ours.

This realization presents each of us with a choice. We can try to bring the outer world (and the people in it) under our own control and dominion—the second kind of desire. Or, we can give our inner world over to the outer world to help and enhance others—the third kind of desire (which we'll discuss next).

When self-consciousness is left to itself, it naturally tends towards the second kind, ego-comparative desires. Children soon recognize the power of asserting their independence by a simple "No!" to their parents, and by adolescence they have become hyper-aware of their peers and sense that they are in competition with them on many different levels. This sense of competition can quickly absorb one's attention—who's more popular? Who's smarter? Who's good at sports? Who's better-looking? Who's winning and who's losing? And how do I rank? If we make the mistake of thinking ego-comparative desires are the only kind of happiness, we will get trapped in the "Comparison Game" (more on that later) and can ultimately fall into an existential crisis.

IV. The Third Kind of Desire: Contributive-Empathetic

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But self-consciousness doesn't have to trap us in an ego-comparative competition with others. We can also choose to stop competing with others and instead try to contribute to the well-being of those around us.

Human beings have a powerful capacity for empathy, making a connection with other human beings simply because we recognize their value in and for themselves. We can reach out to others sympathetically and allow them to affect us as well. Children also exhibit this naturally (so much so that we have to train them not to be too open with every stranger they meet).

Empathy begins with a deep awareness of and connection to the other person as uniquely good, which moves us to a sense of identification with them. This identification doesn't reduce our own sense of self, but it does break us out of the egocentric focus on self that isolates us when we're in an ego-comparative mindset.

Empathy forms the basis, then, for the third kind of desire—the contributive desire to make a positive difference to someone or something beyond ourselves.

But this desire doesn't only come from empathy—another important factor is our conscience. Traditionally recognized by philosophers as one of our most important faculties, conscience is basically an inner attraction to and love of goodness and justice and an inner shunning and fear of evil and injustice. We feel nobler and more truly ourselves when we choose the good; conversely, we feel repulsed by evil before we choose it, and guilty and alienated after we choose it.

Conscience is more than a feeling, though—there is also an intellectual component enabling us to judge actions as good/just or evil/unjust. We seem to have an innate sense of certain general principles—do good, avoid evil, be truthful, be fair, don't cause unnecessary harm to others (stealing, murder, etc.)—but need to be taught more specific precepts. The general principles form a minimum standard of justice which can be mainly summed up by the "Silver Rule": "Do not do unto others what you do not want done to you."

Virtually every culture and religion takes this Silver Rule and its principles for granted. European common law, for instance, distinguishes *malum prohibitum* (violations of legislated laws) and *malum in se* (crimes evil in themselves, like killing an innocent person). People can plead ignorance in cases of *malum prohibitum*, but not in cases of *malum in se*, because the law expects everyone to know the general principles of conscience.

Conscience can be lost or suppressed by severe trauma or neglect (which disconnect one involuntarily from one's natural feelings), or it can be voluntarily weakened by habitual bad choices (which dull the feelings of guilt through repetition). On the positive side, conscience can also be enhanced in an environment that encourages virtuous living. Societies can become more virtuous as well through the presence of exceptionally virtuous individuals who act as role models and increase our collective awareness of injustice.

The Contributive-Empathetic Desire

So how do empathy and conscience lead us to be more contributive people? They can keep us from treating others negatively (because we appreciate them as people and recognize the evil of harming them) but they can also inspire us to move toward great heights of positivity. We may be tempted to think of idealism and generosity as something rare that ordinary people don't strive for, but in reality we all want our lives to be significant in some way, and that ultimately means leaving the world better off for us having been here. Nobody wants to look back at their life at 70 and say "What was the difference between the value of my life and the value of a rock? Not much."

Although the satisfaction isn't as immediate as eating a great meal or getting a standing ovation (the first two kinds of desire), the act of making a world a better place produces its own form of happiness that can become just as intoxicating. We can see this in the movie *Schindler's List*, where the protagonist originally hires Jewish workers at his factory because of their lower cost (appealing to the first two kinds of desire) but eventually his conscience and empathy is moved by their peril at the hands of the Nazis (an appeal to the third kind of desire), leading him to make great personal risks and sacrifices to protect them. We probably know people in our own lives who are "dominantly contributive"—so focused on making a positive difference that they willingly sacrifice the first and second kind of happiness in their own lives to pursue the third kind.

How do we attain contributive happiness in our own lives?

1. By making contributions to others—you might help a family member or a friend to get a job or go to college. You might write a book that is helpful to others, invent a process to help an organization, volunteer at a community center, help church members understand their faith, or attempt to bring greater value or virtue to the culture.
2. By simply being with others—listening to someone who is having a rough time, spending time with children or an older relative, visiting someone in the hospital or in mourning. These pure acts of empathy can make a big difference in a person's life.

When we pursue opportunities to contribute, our own viewpoint on the world begins to shift. Instead of searching for opportunities to get ahead ourselves, we naturally seek opportunities to make a positive difference. Incidentally, this also makes us very efficient in our use of time, learning how to still take care of our first and second kinds of happiness (which still have their proper place) while making room to do as much good for others as we can.

Conclusion

Our survey of the first three kinds of happiness already reveals how wonderfully deep and complex we are, with our physical power to sense the world around us, our self-conscious ability to sense our own inner world, our power of empathy to reach out and touch the inner world of others, and our power of conscience which moves us not only to avoid evil but to pursue the heights of goodness and social justice.

But we're just getting started. The four kinds of happiness form a hierarchy, and by the time we look at the final kind of happiness, we will discover our transcendent powers that bring our self-consciousness, empathy and conscience to new, almost unimaginable heights.

Chapter Two: Four Levels of Happiness

Introduction

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We are now in a position to explore the relationship among the four kinds of happiness, as well as the journey that takes us from one kind to another.

I. The Four Levels of Happiness

The four kinds of happiness are not interchangeable—eating a nice meal, winning an Olympic medal and building a homeless shelter obviously give different forms of satisfaction. Based on these differences, we can organize the four kinds of happiness into four levels of happiness, according to these criteria:

Pervasiveness—how far out the effects of the happiness extend beyond the self

Endurance—how long the effects of happiness last

Depth—how deeply our higher powers (intellectual, creative, psychological) are engaged

As we move up the levels, the happiness becomes more pervasive, enduring, and deep. The first kind of happiness, pleasure from satisfying biological needs, is the lowest level. The satisfaction of eating a hamburger, for instance, doesn't extend beyond the self at all, it doesn't endure at all once you've finished eating (at which point you might even regret it), and it doesn't engage our creativity or stimulate our intellect.

Ego-comparative happiness is the second level, and ranks higher on these criteria. The satisfaction of winning is still limited to yourself, but it does endure a little longer (you can bask in the 'afterglow' of winning, though it can fade frustratingly fast) and it does often engage our higher powers as we strive to master a skill.

There is a qualitative change as we move to levels three and four. Contributive happiness ranks high on all three criteria—actions we do to help others can reach out to touch many people beyond ourselves, its effects can sometimes change people for life, and it often demands full engagement of our minds, hearts and ingenuity. Level four, which we will look at in more depth at the end of this volume, takes us to an even higher transcendent level, where effects can extend beyond the earthly realm altogether, last for eternity, and engage depths in ourselves that we didn't even know we had. But we will come to that in time. For now, here's a chart that can help summarize the four levels:

4 LEVELS OF HAPPINESS

Level 4	Transcendent
Source	Transcendental awareness of and desire for the sacred and spiritual as well as perfect and unconditional truth, love, justice-goodness, beauty & being-home.
Satisfaction	Openness to a transcendental power who is perfect and unconditional truth, love, justice-goodness, beauty & being-home.
Problem	Not maintaining life of prayer and moral-spiritual connection.
↑	↑
Level 3	Contributive-Empathic
Source	Self-consciousness, as well as empathy, and conscience, creating a desire to make an optimal positive difference to the world beyond myself.
Satisfaction	Contributing through actions and empathy to family, friends, organization, stake holders of organization, community, church, kingdom of God, culture, and society.
Problem	Does not deal with the five transcendental desires and the yearning for the sacred.
↑	↑
Level 2	Ego-Comparative
Source	Self-consciousness - trying to bring the outer world under the influence or dominion of the inner world (ego world).
Satisfaction	Comparative advantage in achievement, status, popularity, intelligence, perceived intelligence, power, control, and winning.
Problem	Does not address the contributive; a profound emptiness, and negative emotions of the comparison game.
↑	↑
Level 1	External-Pleasure-Material
Source	Brain and sensory faculties
Satisfaction	Food, drink, shelter, affection, procreation, and material satisfaction - clothes, house, car, jewelry, and other material goods.
Problem	Superficial, profound emptiness, reduces self to the merely material.

You might be wondering—if the higher levels of happiness are so much better, why don't we all just go around being generous and holy? Why would anyone want to stay focused on pleasure and on winning if those levels are less satisfying by themselves? Basically, there is a trade-off with the higher levels. They are more pervasive, enduring, and deeply satisfying, but the satisfactions of level one and two are more immediately gratifying, more instantly intense, and superficially appealing. Thus, these lower levels form our “default drive” and it takes more effort to invest in the longer-term rewards of the higher levels.

But the trade-off is worth it—the satisfaction of a highly-contributive life of love and faith leaves a lasting legacy and makes us genuinely happy without any of the negative feelings of emptiness that come with an exclusive focus on lower-level happiness.

Remember, all levels of happiness are real and important—the trick is to prioritize the levels properly. When levels conflict (party all night or study for the test, focus on myself or make time for others) we will be more satisfied if we favor the higher level. When levels one and two become our dominant view of happiness, we risk getting trapped in the “comparison game” and experiencing existential emptiness.

Chapter Three: The Comparison Game

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When we believe pleasure and success are the only real source of happiness, it changes how we define ourselves—the choices we make, the way we view people, the things we value, all become filtered through the narrow goal of what will bring us more pleasure and make us feel more successful. If we have no real sense of the higher levels of happiness, then as early as 10 or 11 we can start mentally splitting the world into two parts—winners and losers. Our school, our parents, our culture—everything can reinforce the idea that we need to compete with others to prove our own value, and that if we don’t get ahead we will be unhappy. Unfortunately, this winner-loser model really winds up making everyone unhappy. Let’s consider the options.

THE COMPARISON GAME

“Better Than” Winner	Ego sensitivity, unable to make mistakes, blame game, contempt, resentment when not enough praise, arrogance leads to avoidance by others Loneliness/emptiness
↑ ↓	↑ ↓
“Caught in Between”	Mixture of winner and loser emotions Fear of loss of esteem Loneliness/emptiness
↑ ↓	↑ ↓
“Worse Than” Loser	Inferiority, jealousy, depression, self-pity, small comfort zone Loneliness/emptiness

Losing

Those who decide they are “losers” feel negatively judged and found lacking by others, and as a result feel rejected, lonely and inferior. While the unhappiness here may seem obvious, it actually has a deeper, hidden cause. People who feel worthless because they lack certain objective talents—intelligence, attractiveness, athletic ability, wealth—are making the mistake of objectifying themselves. Because they are unaware of levels three and four, they do not see their personhood, personality, lovability, love of others, and empathy as being important, nor do they see themselves as valued and loved by God with a transcendent dignity and destiny. Their sense of self is instead limited to a set of things

about themselves. No one can appreciate their true worth in this mindset.

“Losing” brings other negative effects as well. A form of depression is a very common reaction. (Unlike the chemical imbalance or trauma-induced forms which can require therapy or pharmaceutical remedies, this depression can usually be remedied by learning to reorient one’s dominant view of happiness.) Self-pity can also develop—one seeks satisfaction by dwelling on one’s outsider status, which can create a dangerous spiral of further isolation, sometimes leading to self-destructive or even suicidal behaviors. Finally, a “losing” mindset can steadily narrow our comfort zone of activities we’re willing to try. Fear of failure can trigger anxiety when trying new or challenging things, and to avoid this anxiety, we just stop trying anything that we’re not already “good” at. Of course, this creates a destructive spiral, too—the less things we try, the more isolated we become and the less successful we feel, which makes us more fearful and constricts our comfort zone further, and so on.

The only way out of these traps is to stop “objectifying” ourselves and move into the less constricting mindsets of the higher levels of happiness.

Winning

Of course, it might seem that the way out of the trap of losing is winning. We won’t feel worthless or self-pitying if we’re actually successful, right?

It turns out objectifying ourselves is still unsatisfying when we “win.” First, the satisfaction of winning doesn’t last. The “ego highs” are short lived, requiring increased effort to feed the addiction. We need greater and greater achievements to keep feeling that we’re still the best, often forcing us to exaggerate our accomplishments or engage in risky or unethical behaviors to get ahead. This increased focus on our own success makes winners run the risk of narcissistic behaviors.

Ironically, the need for others to idolize us can be self-defeating—the pursuit of self-aggrandizement makes us more selfish and “affectively diminished.” We become less concerned with others and even less capable of experiencing and giving love. Other people, in turn, emotionally withdraw from us and eventually stop thinking we’re so great after all. As a result, the winner feels a great loss and becomes resentful and even destructive, trying to belittle their former admirers or to undermine everything they respect, anything that can make the winner superior by comparison.

Narcissism and anger often go hand-in-hand, actually, because people can never give enough admiration to fully satisfy the demands of ego, and because the increased needs of

addiction means that ego can never appreciate the admiration and success it has already attained.

Other negative consequences include perfectionism—the harsh judgment that winners apply to others also leaves them dissatisfied with themselves—and ego sensitivity, where the smallest mistake is magnified into a massive threat to their status (because their self-worth depends on that status). Ultimately, winning can never bring peace, as it is always under threat of being lost, and between the ego highs, there lurks a sense of foreboding and the nagging awareness that they’ve fabricated an illusory version of themselves that they don’t even believe in.

Caught In-Between

Most people in the comparison game will find themselves caught in-between winning and losing—they have “good days” and “bad days”, often fluctuating between feeling superior and inferior depending on their latest success or failure. These emotional fluctuations are part of a deeper insecurity: “in-between” people are in a perpetual state of fear of loss of esteem, since they are not securely “winners.” They worry their average talent won’t measure up. They have to constantly monitor and manage their image, lest their true mediocrity be exposed. Again, they are identifying their self-worth with their objectified “esteemable self” to the exclusion of the loving, lovable and transcendent self.

Existential Emptiness

Our four fundamental desires are operative whether we acknowledge them or not. If we don’t recognize or act on our desire to make a positive difference to others, or our desire for the transcendent, these unfilled desires leave us feeling empty. It is an existential emptiness because our failure to act on these desires means we are only fulfilling part of ourselves, we are actually failing to become everything we could be. Hence, this kind of unhappiness comes with guilt and angst at the sense that we are throwing our lives away, that we are tragically *wasting* our lives.

Since no one can live indefinitely with these feelings, we have three options when we are face-to-face with this existential emptiness:

1. We can seek a positive solution by moving to dominant level 3 and 4 happiness.

This is the only viable solution. Note that we can’t change by a mere negative attempt to “stop focusing” on pleasure and success, we must positively replace it by pursuing contribution and/or transcendence. Many people, including great saints, have

successfully made this transition, and we will discuss how to do this in the next chapter.

2. We can take evasive action, resulting in a restless heart.

This is the most popular response—when we feel emptiness, we reflexively try to block it out with more pleasure and success. Things like food, alcohol, sex, video games, shopping, travel become compulsions as we lean on them harder to fill a void they were not designed to fill. These compulsions can become reckless-and self-destructive, and eventually push us to a point of reckoning—we must either seek the positive solution above, or...

3. We can give in to the emptiness, sinking into depression and ultimately despair.

This can happen gradually—we start to withdraw. Sleeping more, going out less, leaning into addictions. Depression can take on its own comforting familiarity, and we start to sink into despair. If this decline is not to become tragic, it may require strong intervention from loving friends, the help of a good religious psychotherapist, and efforts to connect with others and with God to bring our contributive and transcendent identities back to our consciousness.

If we see someone on the downslope of a Level One-Two dominant lifestyle—exhibiting fear and jealousy, inferiority and superiority, loneliness and emptiness, or compulsive behaviors—we will want to intervene, ideally, before it reaches the stages of depression and despair. It can be helpful to share our own experiences, as well as the information on the levels of happiness found here.

Finally, remember that a life with a dominant Level Three-Four identity should not preclude the pursuit of Level One-Two happiness. Things like physical pleasure, health, and academic or financial success can definitely be good when they are being used for good ends. It is important to let the higher levels take a lead role in our lives and keep the lower levels in their proper place, as a means to the end of a fully-lived life.

Chapter Four: Escaping the Comparison Game - The Move to Level 3

Introduction

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We'll now look at some practical guidance on how to make Level Three and Level Four happiness dominant in our lives. This section focuses on Level Three, and the next two chapters—as well as volumes 18-20—focus on Level Four. It doesn't matter which one you choose to focus on first; the important thing is that both levels are necessary. Even an actively contributive life without transcendence can leave us feeling cosmically empty (as we'll see in Chapter Five, below). Similarly, if Level Four isn't accompanied by Level Three, it can lead to a superficial faith that doesn't seek to help others, a faith without love.

To transition out of a Level One-Two dominant life, we will need to change our fundamental attitudes in the following four areas:

1. View of Purpose in Life
2. View of Others
3. View of Self
4. View of Freedom

We must deliberately and concretely change what we are looking for in these areas, which will ultimately change our goals and our very identity. (Recall that our view of happiness shapes what we are looking for in life.)

I. A Three-Step Process for Transforming our Fundamental Attitudes

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There are two dimensions to the human psyche—the conscious mind (which is aware of what it wants to do) and the unconscious mind (which is not aware). Our unconscious mind reacts to things based on **instinct** (you smell food and are suddenly hungry), on **lessons and habits** formed in childhood (you automatically remember how to ride a bike even years later), and on **past associations** (you see a child drawing and feel vaguely depressed, because a teacher once said you were too clumsy to draw).

Significantly, our unconscious mind can correct our behavior to maintain past expectations. If we are doing unusually well at a game, for instance, then unexpectedly choke at the end, it can be due to an unconscious “correction” to the level of moderate capability that we unconsciously believe ourselves to have.

This means that if we want to change our dominant form of happiness from Level One-Two to Level Three-Four, it’s not enough to *consciously* think about changing—we have to conform our unconscious minds to our new choices, or it will just “correct” our behavior back to our old ways.

In the following sections, we will go through a list of questions to help both the conscious and unconscious mind refocus from the **inward-centered** Level One-Two dominant view to the **outward-centered** Level Three-Four dominant view. In many cases, we will be exercising our imagination in new ways and may initially draw a blank on some of these questions. We will need to take time for this process to be effective, preferably using this gradual, three-step process:

1. **Establish a 10-15 min time** during the day when you will be free of distraction, then **take the list of questions and simply familiarize yourself with it.** If some answers come to you, feel free to make a note of them, but mostly we are just introducing these questions to our conscious and unconscious mind. If we do this for a month, we can expect the unconscious mind to do the work on its own.

(This is a common problem-solving technique—the famous phrase “Eureka!” comes from a discovery Archimedes made, seemingly in a flash, after letting his unconscious mind work on a problem for a long time.)

2. **Be attentive to the results your unconscious mind produces,** the ones that “pop into your head” like Archimedes’ “Eureka” moment. These often come in unexpected and relaxed moments as, for example, while sleeping or in the shower, so try to jot it down on a piece of paper as soon as possible afterwards.

Over the course of a month or two, you might find your list of questions filling up with short term, medium term, and long term aspirations and opportunities. Arrange this list in order of priority, then end the list with the statement “For this I came.”

3. **Use your imagination to identify the steps needed to put those goals into action,** and put those steps on the calendar. Moving from goals to action requires internal drive, emotion and energy, otherwise they will fizzle out like impulsive New Year’s resolutions.

We can convert thought into action by first imagining ourselves accomplishing a plan. If we believe we are capable of being efficacious, that belief becomes self-fulfilling. Conversely, if we don't believe we are capable, we won't even imagine ourselves doing it, and that negative belief will also prove self-fulfilling.

We are ready to begin. The four lists of questions that follow correspond to the four fundamental attitudes we need to change. It is important to take these in order (since they build on each other) and to undertake only one at a time. Nothing is gained if we take on everything at once and then give up when it proves overwhelming. You'll want to spend at least a three-month period on a list, using the three-step process, before moving on to the next list. This transformation is a lifetime project, after all, so it's worth taking the time to do it effectively.

Attitude	Dominant Level 1-2 ("Default Drive")	Dominant Level 3-4
Purpose in Life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pleasure • Material Accumulation • Ego-Comparative Advantage 	Optimal contribution to family, organization, community, church, culture, society, and kingdom of God
View of Others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Bad News in Others • The Other is Over-against Me 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Others' cultural institutions and church institutions have value and should be promoted if deemed good
View of Self	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Esteemable Self • The "Thingafied" Self 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Loving Self • The Lovable Self • The Transcendent Self

Attitude	Dominant Level 1-2 ("Default Drive")	Dominant Level 3-4
View of Freedom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Freedom From • Getting what I want now • Avoid Constraint By and Responsibility to Others • Commitment is Negative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Freedom For • Desire to get to the most pervasive, enduring, and deep meaning • Self-Sacrifice is Acceptable • Commitment is Positive

II. First Fundamental Attitude: What Kind of Purpose in Life Am I Looking For?

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In our default drive, where Level One-Two is dominant, we are instinctively on the lookout for material and competitive advantages. Even if unconsciously, we are asking questions like, who is the best-looking in this room? Who is sounding smartest in this conversation? Who is doing better than me? How obvious are my weaknesses?

If we want to change our behavior, we have to replace these questions with a new set of questions that refocus our unconscious mind on new goals. In this case, we need concrete goals that answer the question “How can I make a positive difference?”

As we move through the three step process—reading the questions on the chart, gradually filling in the answers that our unconscious supplies, and imagining the steps involved to turn these answers into actions—we will find a new form of energy moving us forward, and a significant diminishment in the negative feelings that come with the comparison game. This new form of happiness carries with it a new sense of purpose. Eventually, it will become an habitual way of thinking, and we will find ourselves strategizing how to accomplish as much as possible without neglecting our loved ones or burning ourselves out.

WHAT AM I LOOKING FOR?–PURPOSE IN LIFE

How can I make a positive difference in the short term, and in the long term?	
Category 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To my family? • To my friends and colleagues
Category 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To my organization? • My organizations stakeholders (employees, management, customers, vendors, etc.)? • To the general welfare of the organization?
Category 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To my community? • To charitable and education institutions within the community? • To the culture? • To the society? • Through education, politics, etc.?
Category 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To my church? • To the Kingdom of God?
<i>FOR THIS I CAME</i>	

**III. Second Fundamental Attitude:
What Am I Looking For In Others?**

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A great French philosopher Gabriel Marcel once noted that you cannot look for both the good news and the bad news in others simultaneously. In a competitive mindset, we naturally focus on the **bad news**: we are anxiously comparing ourselves to others looking for ways that we are superior. We see other people as a problem, which makes it almost impossible to view them with empathy. The bad news eclipses the good news.

Fortunately, the reverse is also true—when we begin by looking for the **good news** in someone, the appreciation and empathy we feel for the other will contextualize and

diminish the bad news, opening the way to friendship and even self-sacrificial love.

Think of someone close to you, and consider what happens when you focus on their failings, weaknesses, annoying tics and so on. You feel impatient and aggrieved—note that in your thoughts, this person becomes reduced to a collection of problems, becomes *something* you have to deal with. Even worse, that person is going to react to your attitude with defensiveness, distrust, resentment . . . a continuing spiral of negative effects just from letting our default Level Two perspective take its course.

Now imagine the reverse—deliberately searching first for the good in the other. This may take some practice, and that’s what the next chart is for. If you reflect on its questions, you will see the other person in a new light, and your anxiety will be replaced with appreciation and natural empathy. This simple shift in viewpoint can radically transform our relationships.

Breaking this cycle of bad news will be difficult at first, so start small. Find just a few positive characteristics in someone who annoys you, put a smile on your face (a physical act that can influence your mood), and say something positive. It’s typically hard to respond to kindness with rudeness, so the person’s response will likely make it easier for you to view them positively, and the cycle will improve. We’ll want to employ the power of our unconscious as well, so here is the chart for the three-step process:

WHAT AM I LOOKING FOR IN OTHERS?

What are the little good things they try to do?
What are their gratuitous acts of kindness?
What are their delightful idiosyncrasies?
What are the subtle and overt ways in which they offer friendship?
What are their values or principles?
What are the great good things they aspire to do?
What are the strengths they have that complement my own?
What are their spiritual or religious commitments?
How do they exemplify transcendent mystery?
In their pursuit of truth?
In their pursuit of love?
In their pursuit of goodness and justice?
In their pursuit of beauty and home?

Our dominant level of happiness is important in forming relationships with others. It is best to make good friends who are committed to the same level, and this is especially important in marriage. Otherwise, the different life goals, values, and definitions of true success will produce conflict. Of course, if the shared dominant level is Level One-Two rather than Three/Four, difficulties will still ensue—you will either compete against each other, or team up to compete against others. This is not to say that we should just avoid people who are Level One-Two dominant; if we are trying to live a Level Three-Four dominant life, we should definitely reach out to such people as we would anyone else, by looking for the good news in them.

IV. Third Fundamental Attitude: What Am I Looking For In Myself?

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The perspective we use to judge others becomes the perspective we use to judge ourselves. If we ignore or disvalue empathy, friendship, generosity, humility, compassion, honesty, and nobility in others, we will fail to pursue and develop them within ourselves.

By doing this we not only reduce ourselves to about 10% of our potential, but we de-personalize ourselves. We no longer think of our personhood, friendship, and presence as having intrinsic worth—and so we replace this intrinsic self-worth with mere *things* about ourselves. When we look at *who* we are, we do not think of loving, lovable, or transcendent characteristics, but only *what* we look like or *how* we compare to others. We have little sense of the goodness of our presence and friendship or the life we bring to relationships.

To fix this perspective, we will need to learn how to look for the good news in ourselves by applying the same three-step process, setting aside a few minutes a day for the questions in this chart.

WHAT AM I LOOKING FOR IN MYSELF?

Relational and Interpersonal Attributes

Do I value and develop empathy for others?

Do I value and develop humility (as an antidote to narcissism)?

Do I value and develop compassion towards others? Do I value and develop loyalty to others?

Do I value and develop patience, kindness and gentleness towards others? Do I value and develop the quality of my personal presence and friendship? Do I value and accept others' friendship and presence in my life?

Do I value the above attributes as much as (or more than) my resume, appearance, net worth?

Ethical and Virtue Attributes

Do I value and develop honesty and character in myself?

Do I value and develop justice or fairness in myself?

Do I value and develop a moral courage in myself?

Do I value and develop ethical principles to which I am committed?

Do I value and develop ethical ideals to which I am committed?

Do I value and develop self-discipline?

Transcendent and Spiritual Attributes

Do I value and develop my awareness of perfect and unconditional truth, love, goodness, beauty, and being?

Do I value and develop my relationship with God?

Do I value and develop my striving to be unconditionally loving (in imitation of God)?

Do I value and develop my striving for unconditional justice and goodness?

V. Fourth Fundamental Attitude: What Kind of Freedom Am I Seeking?

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Our view of freedom is closely tied to our view of happiness. Like happiness, freedom can motivate us even though we have only a vague sense in our mind of what it means. Very often, it is our *unconscious* view of freedom which is causing us to act in ways that we might rationally believe to be unwise or even destructive.

Freedom may seem like an uncomplicated idea, but the American philosopher Isaiah Berlin made a very important distinction between “freedom from” and “freedom for” (or “freedom to”). “**Freedom from**” refers to the avoidance or removal of constraints from the individual pursuit of happiness or fulfillment. Conversely, “**freedom for**” or “freedom to” refers to the pursuit of self-actualization, which includes self-constraint, self-discipline, and commitment to a particular person or course of action.

So “freedom from” and “freedom for” can often come into conflict. If we want to pursue an education so we can have a successful career (“freedom for” self-actualization), we have to be disciplined in our studies and put restrictions on our time (rather than having “freedom from” restrictions and doing whatever we feel like). This is essentially like the conflicts that arise between various levels of happiness—e.g., to achieve the happiness of a committed marriage (Level 3), I must refrain from pursuing every other attractive person I come across (Level 1).

If we have the perspective of “freedom for,” we consider constraint, self-discipline, and sacrifices of lower levels of happiness to be worthwhile, if these sacrifices lead to Level Three and Four fulfillment. There are many expressions for this—“no pain, no gain” and “the early bird gets the worm.” Discipline and constraint are felt to be unpleasant and negative from the vantage point of “freedom from,” but positive and liberating from the vantage point of “freedom for.”

So why is it imperative that we change our view of freedom along with our view of purpose in life, others, and ourselves? If we try to move from Level One-Two to Level Three-Four happiness and purpose in life, but fail to change our view of freedom commensurate with it, we *will* be conflicted, *fight* ourselves, *fear* our new path, and eventually give up on it. In our conscious thoughts, we are “freedom for,” but in our unconscious feelings, we are still “freedom from.”

Ultimately, our view of freedom not only affects how we think but also how we *feel*—we can see this contrast dramatically, for example, in **commitment**.

From the vantage point of “freedom for,” “commitment” means living for something truly pervasive, enduring, and deep—“A pearl of great price worth selling everything to purchase.” People with this perspective see commitment, and all that it entails (foreclosing options, overcoming obstacles, making sacrifices, and having fortitude) as the necessary vehicle to getting what they truly want (their most pervasive, enduring, and deep goal). Thus, they view commitment as positive and even energizing, even though it might be at times unpleasant and difficult.

Conversely, from the vantage point of “freedom from,” commitment is negative. This perspective does not see freedom as the actualization of our highest potential (what is most pervasive, enduring, and deep), but rather as getting what I want when I want it (with “want” being defined in terms of Level One and sometimes Level Two). These individuals see commitment as the foreclosing of desirable options. This negative perspective is *felt* intensely as fear of foreclosing an option that is *really* the right one, and as resentment toward the other for expecting me to make that commitment.

If we are to stabilize our commitments, and avert internal conflict, resentment, “foot dragging,” and fear, we will want to examine some of the attitudes on the following list.

WHAT KIND OF FREEDOM AM I LOOKING FOR?

Assuming that I am committed to making an optimal positive difference to the world and the kingdom of God with my time, talents, and energy, and that I desire the most pervasive, enduring, and deep purpose in life:
Do I feel more passion and excitement about my more pervasive, enduring and deep goals than I do about satisfying my Level One desires and my egocentric desires?
Do I feel excitement and positive energy about making commitments toward my highest goals even though they may have some difficult or unpleasant dimensions (foreclosing options, overcoming obstacles, and "sticking with the plan")?
What kinds of activities hinder or undermine my pursuit of what is most pervasive, enduring, and deep—activities that are wasteful and beneath my true purpose in life?
Do I have enough positive energy about my highest goals to let go of these hindering or wasteful activities?
Am I willing to make sacrifices to have a truly meaningful commitment to someone or some ideal?
Please note that some Level One and Level Two activities are necessary and desirable—so we want to know the point at which Level One and Level Two activities become wasteful or undermine Level Three and Level Four activities. For example, it may be desirable for the purposes of recreation or rest to have a glass of wine or watch a movie, but at what point does drinking wine or going to the movies begin to hinder Level, Three, or Four?

VI. The Benefits of Moving from Dominant Level One-Two to Dominant Level Three-Four

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Bringing the viewpoints in these lists into our unconscious minds is a lifetime project. As the process of transformation starts to change our conscious and unconscious mind, we will have to deal less and less with the negative emotions of the comparison game. Jealousy, fear of loss of esteem, inferiority, contempt, façade building, self-pity, ego sensitivity, resentment, excessive concern about what people are thinking, isolation and loneliness will all begin to subside.

More importantly, the deeper feeling of existential emptiness will lessen its grip, and be replaced by a sense of purpose, substantive identity, and spirit which inspires high ideals and common cause.

Life itself just becomes less of a fight, and more peaceful and satisfying. We don't have to worry about whether someone is *more* talented than we are, so long as we *use our* talent to make a positive difference to others, the culture, and the kingdom of God. We are making the most out of what we have, and we can justify our lives accordingly.

VII. The Level Three-Four Comparison Game

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One warning should be added at this point—the temptation to turn Level Three and Four pursuits into a Level Two comparison game. We can become intoxicated by the pursuit of Level Three and Four objectives, such that we begin to define ourselves in terms of our *list of accomplishments*. Our contributions become yet another way to objectify ourselves, and we begin to *compare* our achievements to those of others, thinking, “My list is bigger than yours,” or “I’m doing more good than you are.”

This egocentric approach is obviously at odds with the whole purpose of Level Three-Four pursuits, which are supposed to draw us out of ourselves through acts of love.

If we continue down this path, slowly but surely, we will become emotionally detached from the people around us. We no longer have any time or psychic energy to be concerned about people -- their well-being, suffering, goodness, and friendship. We really don't enjoy people anymore, barely cracking a smile because we are so involved in saving the world. And people will begin to pull away from us as well, just like they do with any other comparison game “winner.”

How can we avoid this temptation to become self-centered and messianic when we are successful in our pursuit of Level Three and Four purpose? In a word—**love**. Letting one person matter, making time for the little needs of a child, calling a person who is in need, and simply listening to someone who is suffering interrupts the plunge into narcissism. We can use the second list (given above—our view of others) as a tool to deepen love, and move away from the narcissism that the first list (our purpose in life) can sometimes lead to. If we keep a balance between the first and second lists—between doing good and being with—between contribution and empathy, then we will have built a line of defense against the Level Three/Four comparison game.

If **love for others** is not enough to cure us of this egocentric view, we may also need to move to Level Four, and learn from the **Love of God**. God invites us to serve Him by showing us His loving way which enables us to let go of our list of accomplishments and to follow him in *His* way of service—the way of His Son, who had time to be with sinners, the poor, and the weak; who enjoyed his relationships with the simple and the powerful; who listened to the cry of the poor as well as “the wise of this world;” and who sacrificed his life to bring us salvation.

This brings us to our next topic, because the evidence for our transcendent call from God suggests that even Level Three is not enough for optimal happiness. In Volumes 1 and 2 we gave an overview of the considerable evidence for God and a soul. We saw the high likelihood that we are transcendent beings—not only from our capacity to survive bodily death (from near death experiences), but also from our five transcendental desires, and our connection to the Divine Being through the numinous experience and our love of the sacred. In the next Topic we will examine what happens to us when we put off or ignore Level Four desires and capacities in our lives. We are likely to experience yet another set of negative feelings—another dimension of existential emptiness called “cosmic emptiness, alienation, loneliness, and guilt.” However, there is a way out—a little leap of faith toward the loving God who is inviting us into a relationship with Him now that leads to an unimaginably beautiful eternity with Him and others.

Chapter Five: Overcoming Cosmic Emptiness, Loneliness, and Alienation—the Move to Level 4

Introduction

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We now begin the journey toward Level Four happiness and purpose in life. Throughout the rest of this topic, we will combine the positive and negative clues that reveal two dimensions of the call of the transcendent—the **interior call** (our own sense of the sacred, discussed in Volume 2) and the **exterior call** (encountered from our experience of the world around us). Since we discussed the interior call previously, we will concentrate here on three primary manifestations of the exterior call, and how they connect with our interior call.

You might wonder, “Does the call of God really have so many different dimensions? Isn’t this a little complicated?” Couldn’t He have just spoken to us interiorly and said, “I am God, and I’m calling you to Myself, and here is a miracle to prove that it is really Me,” and then you are transformed instantly into the person of your dreams?

Would that it were that simple. God has to contend with one huge mitigating factor—human freedom. As will be seen in the chapters ahead, God truly “thirsts for a faith that is free.” God will not force us, compel us, or even push us into faith—He wants us to respond to His call with freedom and love. So He operates with clues in both the inner domain of our hearts and souls (the interior call), and in the outer world around us (the exterior call). If we carefully probe these clues, we will see his loving and inviting hand—or perhaps better—heart.

I. Is Level Three Enough?

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As we’ve indicated earlier, even Level Three happiness will not be able to satisfy us because we have transcendent desires that call us beyond this life, even if we try to ignore them. We will still want to know everything about everything even if we abandon the pursuit of truth; still desire perfect love even if we think it does not exist; still desire perfect justice and goodness even if we have been disappointed by people’s conduct and the judicial system; still desire perfect beauty even if we believe it is unattainable; and still desire perfect home even if we believe that there is nothing beyond us but emptiness and darkness. We might infer that through our transcendental desires, God is giving us a gigantic clue about who we are and what will make us ultimately happy.

In Volume Two (Chapter Three) we discussed Rudolph Otto's numinous experience, and noted our feeling of mystery-fascination includes feeling of being invited by the "Wholly Other" to seek more or go deeper. Our sense of the numinous and our intuition of the sacred are what make us desire and pursue religious revelation and community. Without religion (with its revelation and church community), we feel radically incomplete—separated from our ultimate dignity and fulfillment. Eliade uses this sense to explain why most people (84%) are religious today and why nearly 100% of people were religious only a century ago. He predicts that those who forsake their religious nature (and call) will feel an overwhelming sense of loss, an unfulfilled yearning for companionship with the Numinous (Divine), and a resulting unhappiness. This prediction is corroborated by a 2004 study published by the American Psychiatric Association, which discovered that non-religiously affiliated people had significantly higher rates of suicide, depression, impulsivity, aggression, familial tensions, and substance abuse by comparison with the religiously affiliated.

All in all, there is significant interior evidence of our call by a numinous, sacred, divine, "Wholly Other" to follow and pursue a life of transcendence, spirituality, and holiness which is necessary for ultimate dignity, fulfillment, completeness and happiness.

In fact, we can find evidence of this call in the *negative* feelings that arise when we do not pursue the call to a transcendent life. Interestingly, both religious and atheistic existentialist philosophers agree that we have deep and pervasive feelings about the meaninglessness of life without God, but they interpret these feelings quite differently. Religious existentialists view them as a call by God to enter into relationship with Him for ultimate meaning, dignity, happiness, authenticity, and fulfillment. Atheistic existentialists— who believe that there is no God, typically for subjective reasons—view these feelings as a part of life's absurdity. There are four of these negative feelings, all happening on a cosmic scale (i.e., involving our sense of the whole of reality):

Cosmic Emptiness

For Kierkegaard and other religious existentialists, this feeling arises out of an absence of purpose, not in the immediate world around us, but in the *totality* of being. This is manifest by an overriding sense of *boredom* present even amidst a beautiful family, a successful career, material comforts, terrific friends, and just about everything a person could want in this world. The boredom keeps telling us that there should be something more—yet that something does not seem to be apparent in the *world around us*. For religious existentialists, cosmic boredom and emptiness are God's way of provoking us

to search for our true purpose, dignity, and destiny (which is spiritual, transcendent, and eternal) -- and not to settle for “terrific success” in the domain of the finite, the mortal, the conditioned, and the imperfect.

Emptiness is perceived not only in the outer world, but also in our inner world. Sometimes we look at ourselves in the mirror and know that the eyes (the windows to the soul) staring back at us have in them a void or darkness or coldness. We may turn to our friends and family to fill the inner emptiness, but it persists because it is not the kind of emptiness that can be filled by a finite and imperfect being, but only a being of absolute and ultimate significance. We can also feel a hole in the pit of our stomach—a hunger that cannot be satisfied by food—that indicates a lack of spiritual and transcendent substance.

Cosmic Alienation

It is not unusual for people to feel perfectly at home with family, friends, community, and culture, yet still feel a pervasive sense of not being at home, not fitting in, or not having a place in the totality of things (the cosmos). Atheistic existentialists would interpret this as yet another sign of the absurdity of life and the inevitability of despair. By contrast, religious existentialists see it as God’s invitation to move more closely to our ultimate home—the transcendent, perfect, and eternal home in Him.

Cosmic Loneliness

The human person is interpersonal. When we are not in relation to others, we feel like a mere fraction of *ourselves*. Other people make us come alive, reflect us back to ourselves, and give us significance in our relationship with them. When we are deprived of the presence of others, we lose this sense of significance, love, and well-being—and along with it, most of our sense of self. It is almost like someone has torn away a part of our being.

The Jewish existentialist philosopher, Martin Buber, noticed that our interpersonal personhood has, as it were, two layers—the “this worldly” layer described above (which he terms “I-thou”) and a transcendent and absolute layer (which he terms “I-Thou”). For Buber, our being not only anticipates and desires other human beings, but also an ultimate and absolute interpersonal Being.

No human relationship will be able to take the place of this transcendent one. Continuing to ignore it makes the loneliness more acute, even if we already have meaningful relationships with family and friends. The autobiographies of many holy people recount how their encounter with the transcendent in prayer or in a church community brought them out of this state of loneliness into a reality they had not even imagined.

Cosmic Guilt

Recall that even if we do not pursue one or more of the various levels of happiness, we still desire them, and that unfilled desire leaves us with a sense of yearning. We then have an underlying sense that we are not living up to our potential, that the most important parts of life are passing us by, and that we have ignored or shirked one of our most important responsibilities. This feeling of guilt can occur not only to a dominant Level Two person (see Chapter Two), but also to a dominant Level Three person who has not yet pursued Level Four. Even though such individuals get tremendous satisfaction from their relationships with and contributions to others, they also feel that there is something missing, and that they are responsible for this missing element in their lives, and so they have a cosmic sense of guilt.

At this juncture, cosmic guilt and cosmic loneliness become intertwined, because the feeling of letting life pass by seems to involve a Personal Being. We have a sense that this Personal Being deserves—and awaits—our response. If we do not give a response we feel a guilt like we are ignoring a parent or a best friend who wants to help us.

There is another dimension of cosmic guilt—a responsibility to help in what was termed “the cosmic struggle between good and evil” (see Volume 2). Modern myths of cosmic struggles between good and evil—such as *The Lord of the Rings*, *Harry Potter*, and *Star Wars*—reflect this common subconscious belief. We sense that we are immersed in that struggle—whether we consciously acknowledge it or not. So when we ignore this cosmic dimension of our lives, we feel like guilty bystanders. When we remain silent to the evil we sense, we feel alienated from our purpose in life and implicitly believe that we are letting other people down.

Cosmic guilt, just like cosmic emptiness, alienation, and loneliness, can be suppressed as we move about in our daily lives. However, as can be seen, there is an interior penalty for doing this—a radical sense of letting down self, others, and a transcendent Personal Being that will not be suppressed.

As we mentioned, religious existentialists have seen these negative feelings as something positive, because they lead us to our true nature, true home, true relationship with the Divine, and therefore to our true selves. However if they are to have this positive effect, we must make a decision to move toward the transcendent domain to which they are pointing—what will be called, “a little leap of faith.”

This doesn't mean we have to blindly believe the interpretation of religious existentialists about these feelings; these feelings and their interpretation are just one more source of evidence. It adds to what we've seen from contemporary physics, logic, and philosophy of mathematics, a transcendent soul capable of surviving bodily death from near death experiences, and the *unconditional* love of God manifest in Jesus Christ. This evidence is so substantial that it merits at least an investigation, if not a first step in a journey toward a transcendent Personal Being.

Before discussing this little leap of faith, then, let's finish our review of the call of the transcendent, and briefly explore how God's invitation comes to us through the outer world.

II. The Exterior Call of the Transcendent

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The exterior call can take many forms. Sometimes it can come through suffering, as when someone with an addiction turns to the help of a higher power as part of a 12-step program. In fact, the difference between choosing and rejecting God in times of suffering can be so momentous in people's lives that we've devoted all of Volume 19 to the topic of suffering.

Another common form the exterior call takes is simply through evangelization. Whether it's a conversation with a trusted friend or a chance encounter with a book or TV show, evangelization typically reaches people intellectually when they have already detected some form of the interior call in their lives and are ready to respond.

Of the many forms the call can take, we'll focus here on three: Church Community, Transcendent Beauty, and Philosophical and Theological Wisdom.

II.A Church Community

Many people grow up in a religious household in which family members attend church services. If as children they feel welcomed and as adolescents they assent to the primary doctrines and moral precepts of the church, they will begin to sense themselves being within a transcendent or spiritual home—not just like being at home with their family, but being at home in the *totality* of things.

Often the lack of feeling at home will motivate people to find a church community. Some people who were raised in a religious household but fell away or felt alienated—as well as people raised without any religion at all—will begin to search for the spiritual or religious to discover what is missing in their lives.

Those who are at home in church receive what might be called a *grace* (a positive intervention from God through which they feel at home with Him), usually when they aren't even looking for it. The child or adolescent is aware that God is there, and when experiences of cosmic alienation or loneliness occur, they freely call upon God to help them.

However, if young people do not nourish their faith, or reject it through apathy or skepticism, the feelings of cosmic emptiness, alienation, and loneliness then begin to emerge. The problem of skepticism and apathy generally requires the third dimension of the "exterior call"—philosophical and theological wisdom (see Section II.C below). It includes the kinds of evidence discussed in Volumes One and Two. (See the Big Book for an account of Fr. Spitzer's own experience on these topics.)

Powerful as a church community is in manifesting God's exterior call, it touches only the surface of a church's potential. As will be seen in later volumes, church communities have the potential to broaden and deepen our relationship with God through worship, learning, and service.

II.B Transcendent Beauty

Beauty is not limited to the senses—many forms of beauty appeal to the mind and heart. Beauty, whether it be found in nature, physical forms, mathematics, physics, poetry, literature, art, architecture, music, or individual people all have a way of pointing upward, toward its origin in an absolutely beautiful Being.

Beauty and the Transcendent

Plato recognized this elevating and transcendent quality of beauty and expressed it as a hierarchy—moving from the beauty of nature, art, and the senses, to the beauty of love, institutions, and laws, then to the beauty of mathematics and sciences, and finally to the beauty of transcendence and the Divine One. In all these things, beauty attracts us, and when we appreciate it, it enhances us, fulfills us, and brings us to a *higher* sense of reality.

Natural Beauty

Beauty does not have the power to push us into the frontier of the transcendent, but only to draw us close to it. If we want to cross the frontier, we must choose to do so through what will be called "a little leap of faith" (see Chapter Six below). Therefore, some individuals come to the frontier and simply stay there. Others feel the invitation of the transcendent to go further, and enter into a relationship with it that can frequently be mystical. Ultimately, beauty can lead Level Four individuals to a felt connection with God. Since most Level Four

individuals have made a little leap of faith and entered into a relationship with God, beauty (whether it be manifest in nature, music, architecture, art, poetry, or literature) reveals *God's* beauty. In doing so, it connects the believer passionately, insightfully, excitedly, and even ecstatically to beauty's divine source. (See the Big Book for several examples of this experience recounted in literature, as well as Fr. Spitzer's own personal account.)

Sacred Beauty

As the entire history of spirituality indicates, there is something intrinsically beautiful about the domain of the sacred. Many of us have had experiences of being moved by a beautiful church, sacred music, liturgy, and sacred art—which all initially appeal to the senses, though they point beyond themselves.

However, there are many other spiritual beauties in the same vein as Plato conceived them—beyond the senses. Spiritual and religious ideas can also incite an experience of sacred beauty (with the excitement, awe, reverence, and even ecstasy that accompanies it). For example, there is something beautiful about scripture, theological ideas, the mystical life, the history of the church, the living tradition, the social encyclicals, the lives of the saints, spiritual literature, spiritual poetry, and the unity of all of these things. Virtually every culture throughout human history has recognized the beauty, enchantment and fulfillment of the spiritual and the sacred.

The outward beauty of religious art, architecture, music and ritual can move us and spark the interior call within us. Our sense of the numinous, the sacred, and the five transcendentals can be activated by entering Notre Dame Cathedral or listening to an orchestral mass—or by a humble chapel or simple hymn.

Sacred beauty can be manifest beyond glorious and awe-inspiring forms (beautiful cathedrals, symphonic masses, frescoes and paintings, sacred liturgy, and spiritual ideas); it extends to simplicity and stillness—the walkway of a Carthusian Monastery, the smile of Mother Teresa, a simple crèche scene, a deed of kindness, or a deed of noble self-sacrifice. These kinds of beauty do not generally inspire awe and mystery, but rather the warm presence of God embedded in sacredness and joy. The beauty of holy people is especially powerful, revealing the love of God in genuine loving action that we can see and experience.

The Effects of Transcendent Beauty

Everybody's spiritual path is different, so be aware of what is happening to you in special moments, in your own unexpected encounters with transcendent beauty. If you allow yourself to be drawn into the beauty of the sacred, it will open upon a deeper and

broader journey. Perhaps you will be moved to daily prayer, or to a retreat, or to a call to teach or serve. Notice that when you allow yourself to be drawn into the life of the sacred, the Lord responds even more intensely—with an invitation to even deeper realities.

II.C Philosophical and Theological Wisdom

God's exterior call can also be manifest in philosophical and theological wisdom which seeks to know the ultimate—ultimate causes, ultimate meaning, ultimate destiny. Individuals who are moved by these great questions and ideas frequently find their way to a God who is perfect and unconditional truth love, goodness, beauty, and being. When these individuals find sufficient rational evidence for this ultimate divine principle, they allow their interior call to be awakened and felt.

Two prominent examples of this mode of transcendent awakening are Jacques Maritain (scientist and philosopher—1882-1973) and Mortimer Adler (philosopher and editor of Britannica's *Great Books of the Western World*—1902-2001).

Jacques Maritain and his wife **Raissa** were materialist academics at the prestigious Sorbonne in Paris. When they found their principles could not satisfactorily explain human existence, they made a pact to commit suicide within a year if they could not find any deeper meaning. Fortunately, they attended the lectures of Henri Bergson who philosophically established the existence of the Absolute. Through further research, they became Catholics, and Jacques Maritain became one of the leading philosophers of his day—blending the thought of contemporary science, art, politics, and culture with Thomistic metaphysics. Raissa became a well-known mystical writer.

Mortimer Adler grew up in a family that had no particular religious proclivity. He was introduced first to the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas, and was very impressed by St. Thomas' metaphysics—particularly the proofs for the existence of God—but it took him a long time to acknowledge the truth of Christian revelation. Once he did this, he began to see the *mystery* of God, and became fascinated with both theology and the spiritual life. He converted to the Episcopalian faith and later became a Catholic. He authored over fifty books, was the editor of Britannica's *Great Books of the Western World* and was a major influence on religious thought and metaphysics in the United States.

This exterior call to the transcendent (through reason and wisdom) arises out of the search for something more meaningful than materialistic, naturalistic, and utilitarian philosophies. It frequently leads to systematic metaphysics and logical proofs for the existence of God (and occasionally scientific evidence for a Creator). There are **six major**

intellectual approaches to God—metaphysical proofs, cosmological proofs, scientific evidence for a creation of the universe, scientific evidence for fine-tuning of universal constants (teleological proofs), evidence of survival of self-consciousness after bodily death from near death experiences, and moral proofs for the existence of God (e.g. Kant and Newman).

This approach to God lends itself to what John Henry Newman called “an informal inference”—a conclusion is more credible if evidence from *several different* sources converge on that conclusion. In this case, if one or two sources had to be modified or corrected, the conclusion about God (based on all six sources) would be relatively unaffected.

When intellectuals, such as Adler or Maritain, become convinced of the veracity of the existence of God, they generally become interested in the consequences of this for their lives. This leads them to an investigation of the nature of created reality, the existence of the soul, and then to happiness, virtue, and purpose in life. A brief encounter with these deeper questions shows the intrinsic limits of reason alone. Some typical questions are—Does God love us or is He indifferent to us (as Aristotle thought)? Does God redeem our suffering? Is there a heaven? Does God answer prayers? Does God guide us? If these questions are to be answered, God will have to reveal himself to us, and tell us about the domain beyond the merely rational. Reason must be complemented by revelation.

Once these thinkers identify a source of revelation (see Chapter Six, below), they tend to move toward an experience of transcendent beauty (described above) which brings them into a relationship with God. Eventually they join a church community through which their relationship with God and their sense of the moral and spiritual life becomes complete.

Even if the pursuit of philosophical and theological wisdom is not what brings you to faith, it can be an important component of faith, strengthening its foundation and leading you to explore new aspects of it.

III. Conclusion

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To review, we now see that Level Four happiness arises out of three dimensions of God’s interior call—(1) our five transcendental desires for perfect and unconditional truth, love, goodness, beauty and home, (2) our awareness of the numinous and the sacred, and (3) an interior relationship with a transcendent Personal Being which is so fundamental that ignoring it can lead to cosmic emptiness, alienation, loneliness, and guilt.

These three dimensions of God's interior call can be complemented and realized by His exterior call through a church community, transcendent beauty, and philosophical and theological wisdom. But we must *choose* to follow the call of the transcendent by making a little leap of faith. This choice means *acting* on the call we have received which can be done by participating in a church community, seeking a deep understanding of spiritual wisdom and God's self-revelation, entering into a life of prayer, trying to live according to God's goodness, and helping others to see their true dignity and destiny.

This is a journey worth taking. It will have trials as well as rewards, experiences of hatred as well as love, encounters with evil as well as goodness, but we can be sure that if we trust in the God of love, He will bring us safely to the home we yearn for.

Chapter Six: How Do We Enter Into a Level Four Life?

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We will explain the transition to Level Four in three steps:

- I. A Little Leap of Faith
- II. Making a rational choice of a source of revelation and a Church
- III. Following the moral and spiritual teachings of the church we choose.

The decision about which source of revelation and which church will be most true and good is the most important and fundamental decision, for as we shall see, the church upon which we decide will ultimately ground the other three decisions—our moral code, our spiritual life, and our way of contending with suffering.

I. A Little Leap of Faith

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Even the most cogent reasonable arguments and the best evidence from physics, logic, mathematics, and medicine will not be able to perfectly ground trust in the loving God. Nevertheless, the evidence and method of reason can be beneficial because it can make the leap of faith less onerous. God allows us to use reason to build, as it were, a bridge across the chasm from this world to the transcendent; we can get very close to the other side, but ultimately, we are going to have to make an act of the will. God does this—not to be elusive—but to protect our freedom, dignity, and love by not forcing us in this choice.

So what is entailed by this “little leap of faith?” It is a movement of the heart to respond to God’s interior call within us. As we have discussed, virtually every person has an *interior awareness of the spiritual-sacred domain*. We instinctively believe that we are more than just our material bodies, that our lives extend beyond this world, and that our being is distinct from that of other animals. This interior awareness of the divine is the invitation to “the leap of faith.” We are not forced or manipulated into this relationship, but only invited into it. Therefore, we are free to respond in whatever way we choose.

This response is not automatic. Some people may not want (choose) to be in relationship with a “supernatural other,” some may see this “other” as an imposition, some may screen out or choose to ignore this Being’s presence for various motives, and some may be talked out of believing in this Being. Therefore, if we are to proceed with a life of faith (Level Four), we will have to choose to respond to the transcendent Being’s invitation; we will need a movement of our hearts and wills—not just an operation of our minds.

If we do make this leap, though, God then moves to help strengthen our relationship with Him through **grace** (favor from God, such as, inspiration, guidance, supernatural assistance, and a deeper and closer relationship with Him). God knows what we need, so we must concentrate on being open to the inspiration of God more than following a set of prescriptions or techniques.

To keep this openness, we need a spiritual life, a source of revelation, a church community, and a commitment to virtue and service that befits a dialogue and a journey. Sometimes in this dialogue, God is calling us and we are responding—and sometimes we are calling upon God and He is responding. Sometimes in our journey, we move in a counterproductive direction and God tries to help us change that direction, and sometimes, we are moving in a productive direction and God encourages us in that direction.

In a way then our journey into Level Four not only *begins* with a little leap of faith (an open and loving response to the invitation of God), but also *continues* with little leaps of trust in His providential love guiding us through good news and bad news, successes and failures, joy and suffering, and light and darkness.

II. Choosing a Source of Revelation and a Church

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Though essential, our leap of faith is not enough—we need guidance on how to follow God’s inspiration and grace, and a church community with which we can worship and find guidance and support. How might we make a *rational* decision about a source of divine revelation and a church community to join? We have already answered these questions in Volumes Four and Six which gave considerable evidence to substantiate Jesus Christ as the ultimate source of revelation and the Catholic Church (initiated by Jesus as his definitive interpreter) in six major steps:

1. In Volume 1 (Chapters 1-2), we showed **the extent to which science and reason can prove a Supreme Being** (God). We noted that reason could not answer many major questions of ultimate concern that center on God’s heart (e.g. about suffering, prayer, heaven, guidance, providence, etc.). God would have to provide us these answers by a **revelation** of Himself.

2. In Volume 4 (Chapter 1) we explored the **seven major characteristics of revelation** in the world’s main religions.

3. In Volume 4 (Chapter 2) we showed how **Christianity was different** from other world religions in four respects concerned with **love**: (a) Jesus' definition of love (*agapē*), (b) Jesus' declaration about God's *unconditional* love, (c) Jesus' declaration that His Father—in his great love—sent Jesus to sacrifice Himself for us, (d) that Jesus and His Father are especially close to “the least of our brothers and sisters—slaves, sinners, the sick, the possessed, and the poor.”

4. In Volume 3 (Chapters 5 and 8) we gave the **evidence for Jesus' resurrection** accessible to **scientific investigation and analysis**. In Volume 3 (Chapter 9) we gave an extensive analysis of the scientific and medical investigations of nine **contemporary miracles** associated with Jesus, His Mother, and Christian saints. Finally, in Volume 3 (Chapters 5-7) we gave **historical evidence** for Jesus' resurrection, gift of the Spirit, miracles in His own name, and self-revelation as “Emmanuel”—“God with us.” This evidence can establish Jesus' resurrection, claim to divine origin, and the truth of His unconditional love as reasonable and responsible.

5. In Volume 6 (Chapters 1-3), we explained the considerable evidence to show that **Jesus intended to establish a church through Peter** and to be present to Peter and his successors through the Holy Spirit until the end of time.

a. In Volume 6 (Chapter 1) we discussed why **a church community is essential**; 30,000 denominations have been started during the last 500 years because of differences in the interpretation of Jesus' words and actions. We noted Jesus must have foreseen this possibility in starting His Church, and that He would have instituted a *supreme* (primary) teaching and juridical authority to be the final word on all such disputes.

b. In Volume 6 (Chapters 2-3) we discussed the evidence for **Jesus initiating and authenticating the Catholic Church** through the office of Peter and his successors.

c. Pope Clement of Rome (early successor of Peter) and St. Ignatius of Antioch (early church father) acknowledge in the 1st century that the Bishop of Rome has **primary authority** over all other bishops. (See Volume 6, Chapter 2, Section VI for more examples among early Church fathers).

6. Three additional clues about why the Catholic Church is the authentic interpreter of Jesus:

a. Current historical and scriptural criticism strongly indicates that the Catholic Church has taught and actualized Jesus' true meaning of the **Holy Eucharist** – see Volume 9 on the mass and Volume 12 on Eucharistic adoration.

b. The Church has maintained **unity** over the ages through the supreme magisterial authority invested in the unbroken line of successors given first to Peter and to his successors up to the present day. The absence of this fractioning—amidst considerable disagreement and dispute—evidences the presence of the Holy Spirit and a fulfillment of Christ's promise to Peter.

c. The **richness of the Catholic Church** in spiritual life, moral life, and intellectual life (the three modes of conversion):

i. **Spiritual life**—The many developments of spirituality (through religious orders and lay associations), the development of Christian mysticism from the desert fathers through the current day, and the development of multiple modes of prayer—from *Lectio Divina* to the discernment of spirits.

ii. **Moral life**—The Catholic Church applied the teachings of Jesus to almost every aspect of moral, social, cultural, and political life, including the development of the notion of conscience, the notion of free will, the development of systematic moral theology, justice theory, natural law theory, the universalization of personhood, inalienable rights theory, and the social teaching of the Catholic Church. There is nothing like this development, systemization, and socio-political application of moral thought in any other religion in world history.

iii. **Intellectual life**—The Catholic Church applied Christian religious and theological thought to virtually every area of scientific and humane thought. See the Big Book for dozens of examples from science, philosophy, literature, and the arts.

Though some leaders and movements in the Church did not adhere to the moral teachings of Christ, the Church did not succumb to these influences, but rather, rectified them through its authentic teaching and juridical authority—and moved beyond them through the remarkable love and faith manifest through its thousands of canonized saints.

As John Henry Newman might say, there is more than enough evidence throughout 2,000 years of history to justify a probative informal inference sufficient to rationally ground our little leap of faith.

III. Fidelity to the Teaching of the Church in our Sacramental, Moral, and Spiritual Life

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What are the other aspects of a Level Four life that flow from one's choice of a church? We have already discussed sacramental life in Part Two (Volumes 6–12); the other three topics we will look at are the Church's teaching on the moral life throughout the rest of Part Three, and the spiritual life and suffering in Part Four.

If the reader has not yet made a decision to be involved in the Catholic Church, the remainder of this *Compendium* will have limited value—relegated to merely intellectual interest. However, if the reader has chosen Jesus as the ultimate source of revelation and the Catholic Church as His definitive interpreter (and has sacramentalized this choice through Baptism, Confirmation and the Holy Eucharist) then the rest of this *Compendium* will provide useful resources and a roadmap to deepen moral and spiritual conversion, as follows:

Moral Conversion (Part Three)

1. Belief in and rejection of spiritual evil and objective moral evil—Volume 14.
2. Awareness of how spiritual evil tempts and deceives—and how the seven capital sins can consume the soul—Volumes 14 & 15.
3. Awareness of how moral virtue, the sacraments and prayer can detach us from evil's influence and the addictions of the capital sins—Volume 16.
4. Knowledge of basic objective moral principles and how to make a rational and good ethical decision—Volume 17.
5. Application of objective moral principles to social ethics and law—Volume 17.

Spiritual Conversion (Part Four)

1. The sacramental life—including the Mass and the Holy Eucharist (Volume 9), Baptism, Confirmation, Reconciliation, Holy Orders, and Sacrament of the Sick (Volume 10), and Marriage (Volume 11).
2. Developing a personal relationship with the Lord—Volume 18.
3. Learning and using four kinds of prayer:
 - a. Spontaneous prayers (in times of need and anxiety)—Volume 18.
 - b. The Examen prayer (for deeper moral conversion)—Volume 20.
 - c. A discipline for following the Holy Spirit (including: rules for discernment of spirits)—Volume 20
 - d. Contemplative prayer (including—*Lectio Divina*, Ignatian meditation, prayer of silence and Christian mysticism)—Volume 20.
4. Personal and community devotional life (devotion to Mary, the saints, and Eucharistic adoration)—Volume 12.
5. How to transform suffering through faith—including why an all-loving God would allow suffering—Volume 19.

As can be seen, there is a huge amount of material concerned with moral and spiritual conversion, and realism dictates that no human being can learn and incorporate all of this into a lifetime of even ardent desire and concerted effort. If we stay on the journey with the Lord and if we sincerely repent for the times when we have failed morally and spiritually, then God will help us to do the rest.