

# Lesson Seven—Happiness, Love, and Suffering

## Outline Summary

### I. The Problem of Suffering

In the last lesson, we considered suffering produced by human evil, but another kind of suffering remains: the suffering produced by the forces of nature.

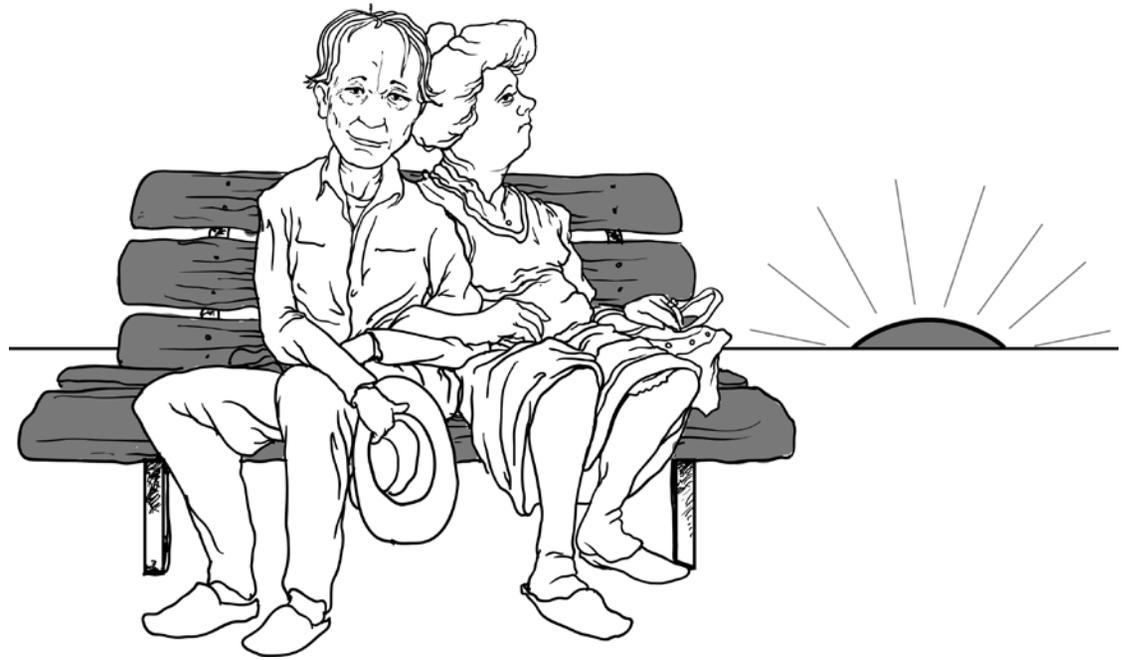
#### Why Does God Allow Suffering Caused by Nature?

##### Love Incompatible with Suffering

If God is all-loving, and suffering is incompatible with love, why did he create a natural world that could cause suffering? Why didn't he create us in a perfect world?

##### Suffering in Our Culture

This question of suffering weighs on the mind of many people today—this is the issue that leads many in our culture away from God. They can't believe that a God of love would allow suffering, and so they refuse to believe in God. They don't encounter the various kinds of evidence of a loving God, as we have surveyed in the preceding lesson. So when they can't answer the question of suffering, it leads them toward a "cruel God", which incites either indifference to or rejection of him. But there is a crucial flaw in the way they are asking the question—the assumption that love and suffering are incompatible.



#### NOTES














# Lesson Seven—Happiness: Love and Suffering

## The Four Levels of Love and Suffering

What we believe about happiness will determine how we define five other important concepts—love, suffering, freedom, ethics, and the common good. Just as there are four levels of happiness, so also there are four levels of these other concepts. The concept we are interested in here is “love”.

People on happiness Level 1 generally view love as the satisfaction of physical-sexual desires. People on happiness Level 2 view love as being loved and admired by others. People on Level 3 view love as contributing to, caring for, and attending to others—and working with others for a common good. On Level 4, love has the same characteristics as Level 3 but goes beyond *this world*—so it is contributing to, caring for, and attending to others’ faith, hope, salvation, and transcendent dignity and mystery.

Notice that *storgē* is possible on all four levels of love, because it is only a feeling. However, it is very difficult—if not impossible—to have meaningful *filia* (friendships), meaningful *eros* (“first priority” friendship and commitment), and *agapē* (self-sacrificial love for the good of the other alone) on Levels 1 and 2. These three kinds of love are available only for people living on Levels 3 or 4. If someone is living on Level 4. He will infuse his *filia*, *eros*, and *agapē* with concern for the other person’s eternal destiny, transcendent dignity, and salvation.

We are now in a position to see how love and suffering can be compatible. As you can imagine, suffering and love are completely incompatible for people who are dominant Level 1 or Level 2. Suffering can’t possibly fulfill someone’s physical-sexual desires (Level 1) or one’s desire to be loved and admired by others (Level 2). However, suffering can have an essential positive influence on Level 3 love, because it can help people to seek deeper meaning in life, humility, courage, virtue, compassion, and care for others. Furthermore, the suffering of others creates the opportunity for us to respond to them with care, compassion, humility, and courage. Similarly, suffering helps people living on Level 4 to trust radically in God, seek their eternal destiny and transcendent dignity as their first priority, and seek God’s grace through prayer. This trust, grace, and transcendent perspective enhance and fortify our unselfish care for and compassion toward other human beings in their transcendent dignity.

It is here that the example of Jesus Christ on the Cross comes fully into play. Even though Jesus’ act of complete self-sacrifice looks like a meaningless and ignominious death to people living on Levels 1 and 2, it manifests complete self-sacrificial love to those living on Level 3. For those living on Level 4, Jesus offers his life as an act of love for the *salvation* of the whole world. We can offer up our suffering to the Father in the same way with the same intention to help others in their salvation.

### **Agapē Is the Only Kind of Love That Can Initiate:**

- Forgiveness
- Compassion for the marginalized
- Sympathy for the sick

### NOTES










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Episode Timecode

**36:29**

## IV. Conclusion

Through it all, we've seen how happiness, love, freedom, suffering, and faith are connected.

When they are all put together, they express our true dignity and destiny in the unconditionally loving God—the one who helps us through the struggles of superficiality, misuses of freedom, and imperfections in ourselves and others, and who guides us on our way to greater love through His Son, Jesus.

Saint Augustine said, “For you have made us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You.”

**So now we leave you with this final challenge:**

- What are the steps you want to take to satisfy the restless heart?
- How will you move into the fullness of love, faith, freedom, happiness, and life?
- What will you do to bring yourself closer to the unconditionally loving God?

Thank you for joining us on this journey into the heights of happiness.

Happiness is a complex issue.

We've come through the **four levels of happiness**.

We've seen the **need to move** to Levels 3 and 4  
and to look for the **good news** in others.

We've also seen how faith can lead to a much **broader and richer life**.

We looked at the evidence for **God**, our **soul**, and **life after death**.

We looked at the **unconditional love** of God,  
the inevitability of **evil**, and  
the mystery of **suffering**.

### NOTES



## About the Author: Father Robert J. Spitzer, S.J., Ph.D.

Born in Honolulu, Hawaii, on May 16, 1952, Father Spitzer is a Catholic priest in the Jesuit order, and is currently the President of the Magis Center of Reason and Faith ([www.magiscenter.com](http://www.magiscenter.com)) and the Spitzer Center ([www.spitzercenter.org](http://www.spitzercenter.org)). The Magis Center produces documentaries, books, high school curricula, college courses, adult-education curricula, and new-media materials to show the close connection between faith and reason in contemporary astrophysics, philosophy, and historical study of the New Testament. The Spitzer Center produces facilitated curricula to strengthen culture, faith, and spirit in Catholic organizations as well as nonprofit and for-profit organizations.

Father Spitzer was President of Gonzaga University from 1998 to 2009. He has made multiple media appearances including Larry King Live (debating Stephen Hawking, Deepak Chopra, and Leonard Mlodinow about creation and science), the Today Show, the History Channel in “God and the Universe”, and a multiple-part PBS series “Closer to the Truth”. He has also appeared on dozens of nationally syndicated radio programs. He has given hundreds of presentations to universities, learned societies, professional societies, corporations, nonprofit organizations, and government agencies both nationally and internationally (including members of Tony Blair’s Cabinet in London, officials of the Russian Orthodox Church in Russia, both sides of the conflict in Northern Ireland, government officials in El Salvador, as well as international universities, corporations, and Catholic organizations).



Robert J. Spitzer, S.J., Ph.D.

**Happiness! The Series** addresses the most basic but often unexamined question of happiness—what it is, where it comes from, and how it defines the choices in our lives.

This companion Study Guide outlines the key points from each of the seven episodes in the series and provides supplemental information and review tools to help you engage the questions raised and ponder their implications for your own life today.

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- Quotations for reflection
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### Other Books by Father Spitzer

*Finding True Happiness: Satisfying Our Restless Hearts*

*New Proofs for the Existence of God: Contributions of Contemporary Physics and Philosophy*  
(Winner of the Catholic Press Association Award for best book in faith and science)

*Ten Universal Principles: A Brief Philosophy of the Life Issues*

*Healing the Culture: A Commonsense Philosophy of Happiness, Freedom, and the Life Issues*

*Spirit of Leadership: Optimizing Creativity and Change in Organizations*

*Five Pillars of the Spiritual Life: A Practical Guide to Prayer for Active People*