

Are You As Happy As You Can Be?

Take The Vision For You spiritual exercises with David Clayton

Three talks:

1. **Introduction** - description of my story, a general description of the process, how this process was passed on to me and the good effect it has had - why I want others to do it
 - a. Take-away: make a start with the daily routine of prayer and meditation
2. **Reflection** - rooting out the causes of our unhappiness
 - a. Take-away: how to analyze our unhappiness
3. **Discernment** - how we discern our personal vocation and make it happen.
 - a. The steps towards our personal goal.

Over thirty years ago, by chance, I met someone called David Birtwistle who asked me this question. I was miserable and depressed about the direction my life was going. He told me that he could show me a way to feel better and have a new direction in life. I wanted to be an artist and live in America. I ended up as Artist in Residence at an American college several years later. But more than that it transformed my whole outlook in life. Where I was bitter, difficult to get on with and pessimistic I have become optimistic and happy. Furthermore, I was an atheist, and as a result of this process, I became Catholic. David was a Catholic although he didn't tell me until much later, as I would not have done it if I had known. He eventually became my sponsor when I was received into the Church, in May 1992.

David died nine years after I met him, but he made me promise, in common with many others who benefitted from his help, to hand on to others what he had given to me. I have since passed this on to dozens of people who asked me about it. Some had faith and some did not. Many of those have become Catholic converts or reverts. The great discovery we who benefitted from this process have made is that we have the freedom to choose. We can choose to be happy or to be miserable almost regardless of circumstances.

I describe both the process itself in my books, *The Vision for You - How to Discover the Life You Were Made For*; and a condensed presentation of the same process *The Vision for You - A Short Summary of the Spiritual Exercises & a Manual to Accompany Workshops*.

What is the Vision for You?

The process is a program of spiritual exercises rooted in the Western tradition. This is the ancient wisdom of the Early Church. If you are Christian it can deepen and enrich your faith. But it can also work for atheists (like me when I did it) or generic 'believers'. While everything you do is consistent with the Faith, you don't have to be a Christian or even to believe in God in order to benefit from it. You do need to have sufficient open-mindedness to accept the possibility of the existence of a loving God and to take actions that are consistent with the existence of God, such as prayer. You might say you need to act as though God exists, but beyond that, you can be as skeptical and doubtful as you like. Many people who start off as skeptics do go on to develop a

strong faith in God and some even become Christians (like me!). However, this is a personal choice that many others do not make. The process itself is a structured program of prayer, meditation, contemplation, and service. Typically it takes around 10 personal consultations to go through it. Typically these are weekly or biweekly. Through this, the hope is that you will adopt new habits of life that maintain the momentum.

Who will it help? I was deeply miserable and depressed and was at the point of despair. Some people have deeply ingrained habits and behaviors that they despair of ever being able to stop - this process has helped many in this situation too (I am one of those people whose life needed an overhaul but felt powerless to change it). Desperation and such extreme misery are not prerequisites, however. If you feel that life is flat and could be better, to the extent that you are prepared to put in some work to change things, this could be for you too.