‘Yes, we’re happy … We could all use a little more money, but we have what we need, and what we don’t have, God takes care of.’

‘What would you do if you had more money?’

‘Probably buy bigger houses … But on the other hand, we probably wouldn’t meet like this every afternoon. So, maybe not.’

Three women sitting on cement blocks in front of their houses, Monterrey, Mexico. Average household income, ‘perhaps $500 per month’. From Dan Buettner, *Thrive*

What makes for a good life?

To put the pursuit of happiness in its proper context, we need some notion of what a good life looks like. One of the more noteworthy features of a good life is that, like a good play or a pleasant visit from the in-laws, it eventually draws to a conclusion: you die. This is probably not something you are looking forward to, but neither is it such a terrible thing. If the old never died, the young would soon find things pretty crowded, and get really tired of hearing the same stories over and over again. And if you alone gained immortality, you would soon find things pretty lonely and weird, as the world leaves you behind. We don’t know what happens when we die, but I suspect you aren’t planning to end up someplace uncomfortably warm. If there's no afterlife at all, then it's going to be pretty much like it was before you were born. That wasn’t so bad, was it?

Before your time comes, you may look back on a long life and take stock. Did you have a good life? This is the really important question, the one you really want to get right. But how can you tell? What counts as a good life?

It is surprisingly hard to define a good life. Or maybe not so surprising. But let me venture a suggestion. I’m not sure it's correct; in fact I’m not aware of many similar discussions in the literature, so these waters are not as well-charted as one might expect. But it seems a reasonable starting point.

Let's say that a good life is a life you could reasonably affirm. Put another way, *a good life is a life that you could justifiably be satisfied with*. (I am being brief here, leaving a more detailed argument for another time.) Call this a ‘justified affirmation’ account of the good life.

There may be other reasonable ways to think about ‘good lives’, serving different purposes. When setting goals for oneself, or one's government, it may make sense to focus on a more demanding notion of the good life: a life worth aspiring to. This would be a ‘justified aspiration’ notion of the good life.

Here, though, I am interested in the way we evaluate lives as they are lived, or when looking back on them. The question is, when are we justified in affirming, or being satisfied with, our lives? As the last two chapters explained, there seem to be at least two fundamental parts to a good life: whether your life is good *for* you, and whether the way you lead it is good. Well-being, and virtue.

We saw in Chapter 3 that it may not be very important whether you are *actually* satisfied with your life. But here the question is whether you have reason to be satisfied with your life. Whether you *could* reasonably take such an attitude. This is a question about how your life measures up, not your state of mind. And that could be important even if it doesn't matter so much whether you actually do have the attitude.

Interestingly, for your life to be good for you, it does not have to go well for you; you don't need to fare well, or do well. You don't need a high level of well-being. Your life just needs to be a good thing for you to have had. For this, it may suffice if your life is *worth living* for you: better than having not lived. But this seems a bit weak: a life just barely worth living seems at best to be okay, acceptable, or maybe tolerable. So let's say, to count as a genuine good for you, your life has to be *well* worth living for you: substantially better than having not lived. This is vague, but we shouldn't expect precision here.

So one part of the good life concerns your *well-being*. The other part, very roughly, is the ethical part of it, or *virtue*. Have you conducted yourself well? Have you chosen and acted well? Choosing and living well isn't just a moral thing: it's more broadly a matter of living sensibly and wisely. This might include being prudent in your personal affairs, maintaining your dignity, getting the most out of life, and so forth. If you live very well, we might say you lived *admirably*.

All that said, morality is clearly the most important part of the picture, and the most important thing to get right in a good life. We already saw this in Chapter 7, but let's examine the point a bit closer. In thinking about good lives, it can be helpful to apply the 'eulogy test': imagine you're delivering the eulogy for a person. Make it a dry run to an empty room so you don't have to worry about offending anyone. Would you say that he had a good life?

As a general rule, people tend not to say that bad people had good lives. If you think so-and-so was a moral degenerate who treated people like dirt, you are not very likely to think of him as having had a good life. Even if he were wealthy, happy, and admired by many, having essentially got away with being a horrible person.

On the flip side, think of someone you consider to have been a really good person, who conducted her life courageously, kindly, justly, and in an otherwise morally admirable way. Most likely, you would also deem her to have had a good life. Abraham Lincoln and Winston Churchill suffered greatly from depression. Martin Luther King, Jr., was murdered at age 39 after a not particularly cushy career leading the civil rights movement. During the prime of his life, Nelson Mandela spent 27 years in prison. None of them had particularly enviable lives. Yet these are the sorts of people who tend to get cited as *paradigms* of good lives.

When we talk of good lives, are we just talking about *morally* good or virtuous lives? Certainly not. Think again of the eulogy test: is it not relevant, when summing up a person's life, whether she enjoyed it? Whether she was happy, or miserable? Whether she succeeded or failed in her important goals? Mandela seems to have had a good life, at least given the standard narrative of things. But the fact that he spent nearly three decades in a prison cell, after which his marriage crumbled, at least prompts one to pause and think about it. It would have been an even better life had he been able to accomplish great things without so much suffering.

Now imagine a very kind, courageous, and honourable person who does good works for others, but endures an endless stream of horrors: excruciating illnesses, ostracism, and public humiliation. Watching her children die one by one. A lifelong depression that frequently leaves her contemplating suicide. And an early, lonely, painful death. So few were the consolations of this life that she would rather never have been born. Her goodness as a person counts for a lot, yet it would be hard to call this a good life. On the contrary, it sounds like a very undesirable life, a life one would be hard-pressed to affirm.

A good life may not require doing or faring well. But it seems one must do well enough to make life well worth living. And most of all, it requires acting reasonably well. A good life is a life well-lived, and well worth living.

Prospects for a good life

There is a happy moral to this account of the good life: the good life is not hard to get. The well-being side of the equation, after all, is very undemanding. Even the average Charlie Brown, for whom things rarely go well, can still have a life well worth living. Most of the time, life is awash in small pleasures: almost every hour brings pleasant smells, pleasing sights and sounds, agreeable sensations, amusing thoughts. This is not always so obvious, because we are so used to it, and because we are wired to respond more strongly to the bad things. (This is called 'negativity bias'.)

Yes, there are times when the suffering overwhelmingly trumps the pleasures. Indeed when no consciousness at all might be preferable. For some periods, life may be such that it genuinely wouldn't be worth living, if that's all the future could bring. Yet no one reaches old age and lies on his deathbed thinking, 'if only I had killed myself when I was 17. Suicide really was the answer.' I've not heard of it, anyway. Eventually the pain subsides, age mellows us and gives us a better sense of proportion, and we realize how good it is to be alive.

Since the well-being part of a good life is so easily met, the chief obstacle to a good life, for most of us, is our own choices. We are far more likely to undermine our lives by acting badly than by being unhappy or unsuccessful. If you do badly by your family, cheat people, are selfish or just plain mean, you will have a much harder time saying honestly that you're satisfied with your life.

The other side of this, though, is that *the most important element of a good life is wholly in your control*: it is your choice whether to act well. For the most part, whether you have a good life is up to you. You may or may not find happiness. But you can handle life's slings and arrows with goodness, dignity, and grace.

I would suggest that most people do, and consequently have good lives: lives worthy of affirmation. This may be the real lesson of the high rates of reported life satisfaction around the world: perhaps most people are satisfied with their lives because they have good *reason* to be. It does not mean they are happy or even doing well. It just means they recognize their lives to be good, and appreciate it. If anything, perhaps *more* people should be satisfied with their lives. Maybe many people fail to recognize how good their lives really are.

So most people have lives well worth living, and arguably conduct themselves reasonably well: mostly doing right by their families and friends, honouring their debts, earning an honest living, fulfilling their obligations—leading decent, dignified lives. Even those hobbled by severe disabilities can choose to handle them well. They may also bring joy, meaning, and inspiration into the lives of those around them. However modest your achievements, you can take satisfaction in knowing that you handled your responsibilities, knew something of love, and took in a bit of Earth's, and humankind's, splendour.

For my own part, most of the good lives that come to mind involve average folks leading pretty ordinary lives. (Though if you think about it, even the most ordinary human life is a pretty extraordinary thing.) In fact good lives may be inversely correlated with accomplishment and fame: notoriety and extraordinary achievements tend to require a single-minded devotion that can compromise more fundamental elements of a good life, like family relationships. I've met a good number of accomplished people, very impressive in their fields. But more than a few of them have come across as pretty unimpressive human beings, whose families I do not envy.

The homemaker who shepherded her family over the decades with discernment, sensitivity, wisdom, patience, and a sharp wit may pass unremarked by the wider world. But I would much prefer that my children go on to lead lives like hers than Woolf's, Wittgenstein's, Van Gogh's, or Hemingway's. Those of us observing from a safe distance should be glad of the great men and women whose fruits we enjoy. But that doesn't mean we should want to live like them.

Setting priorities

Knowing the criteria for a good life is a far cry from knowing how to get there. So how does one put the claims made in this book into practice? What does our discussion suggest about what our priorities should be?

There's really no general answer to this question, because each of us has different problems and different needs. Anyway, I have no expertise in advising people about their lives. Still, it seems a waste to have come this far and not at least have a conversation about what our priorities ought to be. Each of us is different, but not that different. All human beings face a lot of similar problems, and have a lot of similar needs. Many of our values are common, as well. Consider how you can become friends with people in any part of the world, and how we can all enjoy many of the same stories and films. Nobody watches *Star Wars* and thinks Darth Vader is a really terrific guy.

So here, for what it's worth, are a few suggestions on the most important items to bear in mind—areas where it is easy to make mistakes that make your life worse. They will not apply to all persons at all times, but they might apply to most. While these reflections draw on my philosophical training and knowledge of the scientific literature, it is not expert counsel, nor will I offer any real argument for the list. These are just suggestions, based on my sense of where the most significant practical concerns lie. You'll likely have your own ideas in these matters, perhaps better suited to your personality and circumstances.

What sort of list would you offer to a friend, sibling, or child trying to decide how to live?

Connect with people and things that matter

"Someday, someday, but certainly not now, I'd like to learn how to have a conversation."

- A 16-year-old boy who relies heavily on texting

This, we saw earlier, is both a key source of happiness and, independently, an important part of living well. Especially today, when so many forces try to get us absorbed in trivia, it is easy to devote far too many of one's waking hours to things that aren't worthwhile or important. Family and friends are the obvious case here, but beauty, excellence, and other forms of worth are all major sources of meaning in our lives. And failing to engage enough with them is the sort of thing we are all too likely to recognize at funerals.

I once spent some time with a deeply unhappy, fractured family who displayed all the signs of a materialistic lifestyle. Work was about making as much money as possible. That money was spent on fancy cars and other markers of status. Shopping was one of their main leisure activities, with one young woman describing herself as a 'shopping addict'. Most of the family seemed lost talking about anything they regarded as very important, or having any real substance at all. Deep or meaningful conversation was apparently not a regular feature of their lives. They seemed isolated from one another, locked in their own private worlds.

Yet they were nice, likable people whose core values seemed perfectly healthy, and little different from anyone else's. They cared deeply about their family and other relationships, and there is little doubt that they valued familiar virtues like honesty, fairness, kindness, and loyalty. They treasured memories of personal achievements, shared experiences, and other meaningful episodes in their lives.

Most likely, they were simply pursuing the kinds of goals that their culture validated and made readily available to them. Perhaps it never occurred to them that there were viable, honourable alternatives to the single-minded pursuit of money, stuff, and status. And so they pursued a way of life that served their appetites, but undermined the things they actually cared about. The experience left me disheartened to be part of a culture that lets people down so profoundly, urging us to put our lives so thoroughly at odds with our own values.

Materialism is one threat to connection; perpetual distraction is another. As I write, we are just a decade or two into a new era of potentially nonstop artificial stimulation: cell phones, texting, handheld video games, home gaming consoles, iPads, iPods, iPhones, Facebook, Twitter, the internet, and probably a bunch of other stuff I'm forgetting. I enjoy using many of these technologies, which are popular for a reason. Sometimes they enhance our relationships, for instance helping us keep in touch with distant friends and relatives.

But they also serve less rewarding ends, and can be more than a little addictive. Having an iPhone at your disposal is like hanging a sack of doughnuts and chocolates around your neck. Yes, you *can* moderate your consumption to a healthy level. But there's a good chance you won't. The next thing you know you're texting friends from Mom's funeral, eating your dinners with headphones

on, waking at night to check your Facebook feed, and playing Call of Duty at the beach. The modern day lotus eater, insensible to the call of reality.

At the limit: no reflection, no peace, and no genuinely human interactions. Maybe textual simulacra thereof, which have their consolations but resemble actual face-to-face conversations roughly as much as a stick-figure drawing resembles the Mona Lisa. Soon, you may pretty much forget how to talk, as many of us already have. (This becomes starkly apparent when you visit a place where the art of conversation still thrives, like a working-class English pub.)

You can now be plugged in, but disconnected from nearly everything of worth, for every waking moment of the day. I don't know how serious a worry this is long-term. I suspect people will adjust by developing norms and habits to help them keep the technology from stripping away the fabric of their lives and rewiring their brains, leaving them incapable of functioning without constant electronic input. But there's plainly a risk of overdoing it.

A more traditional threat to connection relates to one's choice of occupation. When choosing a line of work, the temptation to go for money and status can be powerful. Particularly if you don't have a clear idea what you want to do for a living. However, the first thing to notice is that no one gives a young graduate, who doesn't know a hawk from a handsaw, a big heap of money without extracting a pound of flesh. Those lucrative entry-level jobs in finance, law, or whatever pay a lot because, well, they *have* to pay a lot. No one in their right mind would volunteer to spend 80 hours a week toiling at an unfulfilling job in a semi-abusive environment unless they were either very desperate or very well-paid. Engineers may be among the exceptions to this rule, since they graduate with significant work skills; but then they already made a flesh donation in college.

Short of thievery or dumb luck, like having the right golfing buddies, there seem to be two paths to riches: working really hard in a punishing profession that pays well because no one would do it otherwise (e.g., law), and working really hard at something you are really good at and passionate about (e.g., Steve Jobs). At least, it's hard to imagine how else a functioning market economy could go about allocating the highest salaries. Why put people at the top of the pay scale to kick back and do something easy and fun?

If you're going for money, you'd probably best be in the 'passionate and talented' category or you're not likely to be very happy or have a very meaningful work experience. And if you are one of those individuals, it probably won't truly be the money that's motivating you, but the work itself and the idea of doing it well. The money may primarily be a sign that you're really good at what you do.

But if you're in a position to be able to choose a lucrative career, why should the money be important in the first place? Just having that option makes you a very lucky person who is unlikely to end up in the poor house no matter what you choose to do, unless it's poetry or jazz.

Recall that in the United States, household incomes above $75,000 seem on average to have zero effect on happiness. Based on the findings of a major employment study from 2009–10, this income is less than the average for the *worst-paid* college majors at mid-career, assuming your household has two working partners with similar earnings. Two experienced graduates in social

work or elementary education earned, on average, a combined mid-career salary of about $80,000. Moreover, unemployment rates tended not to vary wildly across college majors—the highest mid-career rates, for architecture and linguistics, ran about 9 to 10 per cent. Those 'low-paid' social work and teaching jobs nonetheless sported decent job security in the survey: elementary educators had among the lowest mid-career unemployment rates, at 3.4 per cent, with social workers at 5.8 per cent. Which is to say that *every* college major—yes, even philosophy—tended to get decent-paying jobs, putting their income above the threshold of minimal returns, happiness-wise. Now these numbers hail from a certain time and place, and this is only a single study. Your prospects may be different. But they do suggest caution in placing a great deal of weight on the financial side of career decisions.

This is not to say that we should be indifferent to the financial side of our work choices. 'Follow your bliss' can be excellent advice, but your spouse won't be so pleased if your bliss involves not being able to pay the bills. Social workers are pretty close to the threshold where money starts to have a significant impact on happiness, and some will fall below the average or live in expensive areas. And even if money troubles don't diminish their happiness they may still have difficulty with things like getting their kids into good schools, weathering unexpected troubles like medical emergencies, or saving for retirement.

There are good reasons to prefer higher-paying jobs, even out of college. But from the happiness perspective, at least, the average person's monetary needs seem to be pretty modest, and easily met by most careers requiring college degrees in the United States. More money has distinct advantages, but you probably won't suffer without it.

All this is by way of saying: it is foolish to let the pursuit of wealth, status, and stuff get in the way of a fulfilling, rewarding work life. If the pursuit of ambitious material goals seriously compromises your ability to connect with people and things that matter, you've likely made a big mistake.

Relax

'Laurie says Ravioli is too busy to play.'

- Three-year-old New Yorker Olivia, about her imaginary playmate Charlie Ravioli, who is usually too busy to play, and his personal assistant, Laurie

Several years back I read an interview with a Mexican businessman whose family had lived in the United States for ten years before returning to live in Merida, reputed to be a lovely city. Both countries have their pros and cons, he said, but he preferred Mexico for himself. Asked if he had any advice for his northerly neighbours, he offered one suggestion: 'Chill!'

Mexican-style laid back is certainly not for everyone; among other things, it comes at the cost of efficiency. This is very much an area where personalities, cultures, and tastes can legitimately differ. But even those who prefer a faster pace of life can try to give themselves a bit of breathing room—some time to slow down, reflect, and recharge. Or, at the very least, to notice things.

On the face of it this point may seem in tension with the idea of connection, and indeed it can be. One way to connect with things of value is to engage in challenging, meaningful work. This can sometimes leave little time to relax. In many cases the tradeoff is worth it, say because the work seems especially meaningful or worthwhile. But it is always a tradeoff, because humans aren't built to always be on 'go'.

For those who have never strayed far from the fast lane, it can be hard to believe how little it is possible to do without getting bored. Our hunter-gatherer ancestors may have had 'work weeks' of fewer than 20 hours, if their present-day counterparts are any guide. (Not that hunting is exactly drudgery for them.) For most of human history, just hanging around and basically doing nothing has probably been a prominent feature of daily life. This may strike you as excruciatingly dull, and again there's nothing unreasonable about preferring a faster pace of life. On the matter of boredom, I've put the question to two trusted acquaintances who've spent a good deal of time with hunters leading traditional lifestyles, and neither saw evidence of it. One, surprised by my question, reported that 'boredom is a concept utterly, completely unknown' among the indigenous peoples he knew.

It is possible that anyone can learn to enjoy a slow pace of life. Used to my everyday busyness, I find it nearly impossible to sit down, relax, and read a book when on vacation. My motor just keeps running in high gear. Yet I once was able to spend enough time in such environs to happily pass entire days doing virtually nothing. It takes weeks or longer to get to that point, but once there it is extremely pleasant, and not at all boring. You can enjoy the simple pleasures of telling jokes about the people who can't just sit down and relax, for instance.

As well, *not* relaxing can get in the way of connection. When we used to do nothing, we didn't just do nothing alone; we very often did nothing together, or what is more usually known as hanging out. (Of course, there are limits to the fulfilments of idleness: life will start seeming pretty pointless if you don't get some meaningful activity in there somewhere.) There's no such thing as squeezing in 'quality time' with your loved ones. You just have to be together, do things together, in a natural, unscheduled, and unhurried way.

One reason for this, and a more general benefit of relaxing a bit, is that time opens up and you become more attentive and receptive to people and things around you, not locked in by the tunnel vision that hurry and stress tend to impose. Better able to appreciate things. As I noted earlier, life is in some ways shorter and more compressed when you don't relax enough.

An English nurse who worked with dying patients began tracking their regrets. Near the top of the list was this: 'I wish I hadn't worked so hard.' She writes:

This came from every male patient that I nursed. They missed their children's youth and their partner's companionship. Women also spoke of this regret, but as most were from an older generation, many of the female patients had not been breadwinners. All of the men I nursed deeply regretted spending so much of their lives on the treadmill of a work existence.

There has lately been some controversy about whether people really tend to make very many serious mistakes about their lives. Among these male patients, at least, we appear to find a 100 per cent failure rate in how they handled some of the weightiest matters in their lives.

Slowing down the pace is one kind of relaxing. Another, though, is not blowing things out of proportion, getting more upset about troubles than they warrant. Not being needy, requiring the best of everything. Not dwelling on the negatives, feeding one's anger and anxieties. Shrugging or laughing off setbacks, choosing to see them as simply a part of the ride. There will always be setbacks.

Avoid debt

If you live in a modern economy, then money matters for happiness, and in a good life. I've been emphasizing how little it matters once you've achieved financial security. Here I want to stress how easy it is to lose that security. One of the wiser claims I have heard about happiness came from a very astute financial planner, whose line of work frequently makes him a family counsellor as well. In essence, he said that one of the biggest mistakes people make in the pursuit of happiness is taking on too much debt. In his words: 'most of the pain and suffering in today's economy is a result of too many consumers using too much debt … to buy too many things they never needed—and could not afford—in the first place'. We are the richest people who ever lived, and still we have trouble living within our means.

Debt is unfreedom: the more debt you've got, the less free you are to live as you want. Large debts make it hard to leave a job that makes you miserable, or gets you caught up in unethical practices. More than a few high-paid professionals, for instance, despise their jobs but owe so much in loans and mortgages in the sorts of houses that advertise 'success' that they're effectively trapped.

Home purchases pose special risks here, because we are vulnerable to 'focusing illusions' that make us exaggerate the importance of the differences between housing options. We tend to overlook crucial, shared features like non-leaky roofs and focus on the differences between our options, which may not be important at all. As psychologist Daniel Kahneman puts it, 'nothing in life is as important as you think it is when you're thinking about it'. In consequence, we put a lot of stock in trifling features like 'curb appeal', forgetting that we won't be spending much time sitting on the curb admiring our mini-mansion's many splendid (leaky) gables. Until, that is, the bank forecloses on us.

Make it come out even

The importance of being moral is pretty obvious, and I suspect you weren't seriously contemplating a life of rape and pillage. But we all slip up sometimes and do things we later feel bad about. Of all the things that give individuals pause when lying on their deathbeds, reflecting on their lives, probably the gravest regrets involve moral failures. Betraying a friend. Screwing up at raising your children. Not being there for someone in need. Showing too little forgiveness.

Simply advising people to ‘be moral’ seems too abstract to be very helpful. Let me frame the point, then, the way my great-grandmother Zada Tuteur put it, as described in one of my father's essays: *make it come out even*. This was, for her, the number one rule for living well.

From a philosopher's perspective this formula leaves much to be desired, as it is very inexact. But from a practical standpoint it seems usefully evocative.

The basic idea is to conclude your life with a favourable balance sheet. Many of us have an intuitive notion of a moral balance sheet (some cultures call it ‘karma’): Have you taken care of your responsibilities? Or have you failed in your obligations, left behind a mess? Have you given enough back, or have you been a ‘taker’? Are people glad to have had you in their lives?

Here's another way to think about it. Call it the ‘conversation test’. Imagine sitting down with all those whose lives you’ve affected, including your children and grandchildren, and all those impacted by your lifestyle decisions. Would you be able to look them in the eye and honestly say that you treated them well enough, and with respect? That you were justified in the way you lived? You need not have an affirmative answer in every case—even the best of us fail to measure up at times. But you are not likely to feel you’ve made it come out even if you consistently fail the test. I suspect such questions will haunt many of my generation in coming decades, once the toll of today's wasteful habits has become all too apparent.

‘Making it come out even’ is a moral metric, not a measure of impacts. Perhaps some of the robber barons of the 19th century contributed more to the world than they took. Yet they may not have made it come out even if their gains were achieved through theft and brutality. Their moral balance sheets may decidedly have wound up in the red. On the flip side, extremely unlucky individuals may feel they’ve gotten a raw deal from society, and believe themselves entitled to even up the score by lashing out at others. But whether or not they received less than they gave to the world, this is not a plausible way to tilt the *moral* accounts in their favour. It is not a way to make it come out even. It simply makes things worse.

I had an uncle who was severely crippled for most of his life, requiring a great deal of care. He was a talented writer who earned some money publishing his work. But on the whole he may have received more, certainly in resources, than he was able to give. Yet by all accounts he made it come out even: he handled his situation with fortitude, wit, and a big heart, brought a great deal into many lives, and made them richer for it. Many people were glad, indeed felt privileged, to have him in their lives. And I suspect those who knew him would agree: he had a good life.

To make it come out even is to be able, when taking your dying breath, to honestly conclude that you’ve held up your end of things, done your part. And, on the whole, not regret the way you’ve treated others over the course of your life. We all have regrets about this or that thing we did wrong. But we can try to make amends, or do better elsewhere, so that, in the end, our balance sheets are in the black.

Conclusion

Summing up: Engage yourself with meaningful activities that interest you, but don't overdo it and forget to relax. Make time for the people you love. Keep a lid on your debts. And make it come out even.

And, I would add: make it easy for yourself to do these things by putting yourself in a context where they tend to come naturally. Surround yourself with good people who seem to you to have their priorities straight. Avoid careers that will put you in bad company. If most folks around you aren't doing a very good job of it, you'll find the going a lot harder.

Suppose, then, that you live as wisely as can reasonably be expected. Will you be happy? Maybe, but that's only partly in your control. But the chances are excellent that you'll have a life well-lived, and well worth living. A good life.

> "Just being alive, having a wonderful family, good friends, watching the sunrise morning after morning - that's what makes me feel good. I think people take their lives for granted. Some just haven't hit that part of their lives where they stop and say, 'I am such a lucky person to have the life that I have'." - Sgt. Michael A. DiRaimondo, in a letter home from Iraq, shortly before being killed in action.