



THE THRIVE PROJECT

strategies for living the good life

What is the good life? The Seven Pillars of the Good Life explained

Welcome to the Thrive Project. Thank you for getting involved.

In this article, I'll share with you the seven pillars of the good life and explain a little bit about each one: why each one is essential for living the good life and some of the strategies we'll look at over the course of The Thrive Project.

If you haven't already, you can read the introductory article on the blog [here](#).

What is the 'Good Life'?

While it's safe to say that we all want to live the good life, what the 'good life' actually means is harder to pin down.

What does the good life look like? How do we know we're living it?

For me, the good life is one that I can look back on with satisfaction at the end of my life.

Have I lived to the best of my ability? Have I savoured the good times? Have I come through the bad times maybe a little wiser and stronger? Have I given something back?

I've come up with seven pillars or facets of life that support a 'good life'. If we want to live more of the good life, then addressing these seven pillars will help us to do so.

The seven pillars of the good life are:

- Health and Wellbeing
- Emotional Wholeness
- Financial Security
- Connection and Relationships
- Simple, Sustainable Living
- Play and Creative, Meaningful Industry
- Ethics and Authenticity

I'll explain each of the pillars below. The rest of the Thrive Project will address each pillar and look at strategies for making the most of them.

The strategies are not a complete list. Please feel free to suggest other topics we can explore as part of the Thrive Project on the [Facebook group](#).

The Seven Pillars of the Good Life

Health and Wellbeing

Good health is fundamental for enhancing the quality of life, while poor health undermines it. The better you feel, the more you can do and enjoy.

Good health is more than the absence of illness and disease; it is the full-functioning of the body, vitality, energy and alertness¹.

And who doesn't want more of that?!

But life naturally ebbs and flows with imbalances and challenges: we age, we get ill, we get hurt - so our definition of health needs to be a little more nuanced.

Consider stories of people like [Kurt Fearnley](#) who, despite physical limits (in his case, born without the lower portion of his spine), achieve incredible things (like 3 Paralympic gold medals) and live an incredibly fulfilling life. Kurt has not let physical limits impair his health and vitality.

In the Thrive Project, we'll look at the latest information on **nutrition**, **physical fitness** and **stress management** and practical ways we can incorporate that information into our day.

¹ Edward Skidelsky and Robert Skidelsky, *How Much Is Enough?: Money and the Good Life*, Kindle Edition (Penguin, 2012), chap. 6.

Emotional Wholeness

When you think of the good life, do you think of being happier?

Almost all of us want to be happier. And that's certainly ok. We could all do with a bit more happiness. But there's more to life, even the good life, than just being happy all the time.

To be human is to experience a wide range of emotions, which is why this pillar is not about happiness alone, but emotional wholeness.

Ironically, ignoring the full range of emotions we're capable of and focusing on happiness will just increase our unhappiness.

"Happiness as a by-product of living your life is a great thing. But happiness as a goal is a recipe for disaster."²

It wouldn't make sense to be joyful at a friend's funeral; it wouldn't be wise to be relaxed and content in the face of danger. On the other hand, it's isn't healthy to be ready for fight or flight while you're spending quality time with loved ones in a safe environment.

All of our emotions are important, useful and fleeting; learning to embrace them and then let them go is what truly leads to the good life.

Imagine for a moment some of your favourite stories. The characters grow, mature, learn and become wiser when they experience life's challenges. As uncomfortable as they are, we don't want to (and can't!) eliminate challenges altogether. Instead, it is healthier to find a way to navigate the emotional ups and downs of life and use our emotions to our advantage.

² Ibid., 43. quoting Barry Schwartz, professor of social theory at Swarthmore College.

“...many people, with or without religious faith, describe a grounding, a calm confidence that keeps them balanced even in the face of turbulent or challenging events – and phases of unhappiness. What such people are describing is a clear sense of purpose, which is neither generated nor influenced by our ever-changing emotional state.”³

Positive emotion is nice to enjoy when it comes, but it can be fleeting. Evaluating your life according to how often you’re feeling good only leads to dissatisfaction.⁴ Deep, real and lasting contentment comes from being satisfied with your life in general, in spite of the good times and the painful ones.

In emotional wholeness, we’ll explore strategies from **positive psychology** (like gratitude), the concept of **mindfulness** and **resilience** (coping with the bad stuff that happens in life).

³ Ibid., 44.

⁴ Pamela A. Hays, *Creating Wellbeing: Four Steps to a Happier, Healthier Life* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2014), 16.

Connections and Relationships

“You can follow all the expert-recommended exercise, dietary, sleep and other health practices to a “T”, but without strong relationships, they won’t make you happy. Social engagement that includes giving and receiving support brings meaning and purpose to our daily activities. Research has suggested that social structure - those mutually reinforcing relationships that build and support healthy choices and lifestyles - have a profound influence on wellbeing.”⁵

Relationships, specifically *positive and mutually reinforcing* relationships (ones where you both give and receive support) are essential for living the good life. Studies suggest that those with strong community connections live longer, healthier and happier lives. You can do all the right things health wise, but chronic loneliness can undermine it.^{6 7}

Humans are naturally herd creatures – even the most introverted of us need social contact. It is in the context of other people that our lives have true meaning.

“We are the authors of each other’s stories through the influence we have on each other, and the way we respond to each other. Each of our stories is unique, but the subtext is universal – it is about finding the answer to just one question: Where do I belong?”⁸

Under this topic, we’ll explore **building strong relationships** and **community connection and involvement**.

⁵ Ibid., 167.

⁶ Ye Luo et al., “Loneliness, Health, and Mortality in Old Age: A National Longitudinal Study,” *Social Science & Medicine*, Part Special Issue: Migration, “illegality”, and health: Mapping embodied vulnerability and debating health-related deservingness, 74, no. 6 (March 2012): 907–14, doi:10.1016/j.socscimed.2011.11.028.

⁷ Keming Yang Senior Lecturer in Sociology at Durham University, “Loneliness Has Serious Health Risks and the Solution Is Social,” *The Conversation*, accessed January 7, 2015, <http://theconversation.com/loneliness-has-serious-health-risks-and-the-solution-is-social-23638>.

⁸ Hugh Mackay, *The Art of Belonging*, Kindle Edition (Australia: Macmillan Australia, 2014), chap. 1.

Financial Security

Financial security is about having ‘enough’.

In a time when continuous growth underpins our economic system, ‘enough’ is almost a forgotten concept.

The unfortunate reality of our economic system is that there are people who struggle daily to have enough to get by, while the rest of us have more than enough: enough money, enough stuff, enough space, enough comfort – and yet we’re not satisfied.

Despite the amazing abundance of our times, financial stress is the number one stressor for many of us. Financial woes are not the foundation of a thriving life.

For those of us who *aren’t* struggling to make ends meet (and we need to be honest about what that actually means), that stress isn’t real: it’s a creation of the current culture of ‘more’, ‘bigger’ and ‘better’.

“It is not just that we want more but that we want more than others, who at the same time want more than us; this fuels an endless race...Economic insatiability is as old as money itself, but it has been greatly exacerbated by the institutions of capitalism...capitalism, especially in its modern ‘turbo’ form, has released the expression of insatiability from its previous restraints. Capitalism promises us the moon – provided we work hard! It brings an increasing range of goods and services under the sway of money exchange, thus inflaming the love of money itself.”⁹

In the Thrive Project, we’ll look at the importance of **frugality** and defining ‘enough’ as a response to continuous economic growth. We’ll also look at ways to **manage our money better**, so finances are not a source of stress.

If you are interested in finding out more *now* on how to manage your money better, check out the [Plan Save Thrive online ecourse](#).

⁹ Skidelsky and Skidelsky, *How Much Is Enough?*, sec. Front Section.

Simple, Sustainable Living

“Perhaps it’s not surprising that a policy of endless economic growth is destined to fail environmentally...What is surprising, however, is the way that growth is failing to achieve social goals. It is not providing lasting solutions to the problems of unemployment and poverty, and it is not making people any happier when they already enjoy enough goods and services. In the quest to lead fulfilling lives, consuming past the point of enough is an exercise in futility.”¹⁰

Enjoying ‘enough’ is as much about how we spend our time as it is about how we spend our money. The goal, for most of us, is to get out of the *work to earn to spend cycle* and spend more time pursuing the things we love. The things that (none of us need convincing) are more important than working to buy bigger and better stuff.

When we live simply and sustainably, we need less money. We reduce our environmental impact. And we lead happier, healthier, more fulfilling lives because we’re focusing on the things that lead to the good life like building relationships.

Simple living can be surprisingly hard because we’re swimming against the cultural current. It’s amazing in how many ways we can be convinced to buy things we don’t need.

In the Thrive Project, we’ll look at things like **decluttering, downsizing, unscheduling, reconnecting with nature, permaculture, sustainable living** and **reducing toxins and chemicals**.

¹⁰ Rob Dietz, Dan O’Neill, and Herman Daly, *Enough Is Enough: Building a Sustainable Economy in a World of Finite Resources*, 1 edition (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2013), 28.

Play and Creative, Meaningful Industry

“The opposite of play is not work, it’s depression.” Stuart Brown, MD.¹¹

Play is essential for stress release, connecting with other people, for physical fitness, for honing problem solving skills and intelligence and for regulating emotion.

And - possibly most importantly - it’s fun!

Which makes it an essential part of living the good life.

“Play is something done for its own sake. It’s voluntary, it’s pleasurable, it offers a sense of engagement, it takes you out of time. And the act itself is more important than the outcome.”¹²

While play is healthy, work, particularly work that involves some creativity (and creativity can mean anything from fixing an engine to cooking a meal, to working out a complex tax issue, to resolving a conflict – it’s not just about the ‘arts’), is what leads to a fulfilling and satisfying life.

Things we’ll cover in the Thrive Project: **play**, **creativity**, **‘flow’** (what it is and how to get into it), **upskilling**, and **purposeful pastimes**.

¹¹ Stuart Brown and Christopher Vaughan, *Play: How It Shapes the Brain, Opens the Imagination, and Invigorates the Soul*, Reprint edition (New York: Avery Trade, 2010).

Also see his inspiring TED Talk: https://www.ted.com/talks/stuart_brown_says_play_is_more_than_fun_it_s_vital

¹² “Play Doesn’t End With Childhood: Why Adults Need Recess Too,” *NPR.org*, accessed January 19, 2015, <http://www.npr.org/blogs/ed/2014/08/06/336360521/play-doesnt-end-with-childhood-why-adults-need-recess-too>.

Values and Purpose

“There’s a paradox at the heart of the good life: we are at our best when we are striving to give others the very things we ourselves most desire – respect, recognition, kindness and even happiness.”¹³

You can’t live the good life without living a moral life.

Purpose, conviction, ethics, connectedness to something bigger than ourselves are important for each of us, regardless of whether we’re religious or not. They provide each of us a guide for our actions as well as give our life meaning.

“What makes a life worth living?...The good life is not the sum of our security, wealth, status, postcode, career success and levels of happiness. The good life is one defined by our capacity for selflessness, the quality of our relationships and our willingness to connect with others in a useful way...I’m referring to a life that is characterized by goodness, a morally praiseworthy life, a life valuable in its impact on others, a life devoted to the common good.”¹⁴

In the Thrive Project, we’ll look at **living a value driven life**.

¹³ Mackay, *The Good Life: What Makes Life Worth Living?*, 169.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.ff

The Seven Pillars as a Whole

While I've broken down good life into seven pillars, the truth is that they are all interconnected and work together as a whole.

Take something as simple as planting a garden. Gardening will provide you with physical activity, nutritious, organic food and save you money. It will reduce your environmental impact and you'll spend time connecting to nature while you participate in meaningful, de-stressing industry. Swapping zucchinis over the fence with a neighbour helps build relationships.

Living the 'good life' is a wholistic lifestyle *choice* that affects all aspects of your life. You can't focus on one pillar of the good life without benefiting from all the others.

Where to from here?

Please feel free to introduce yourself on the Facebook group and tell us what part of the good life most speaks to you at this point in time.

I hope this article has given you some food for thought. I would love to hear what you think and your additions, ideas and reading suggestions.

In the next installment, coming up in the next week or two, we'll start by looking at health and wellness: nutrition.

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