

## THE BIG IDEAS

### The 9 Lessons

For enduring happiness.

### Are You Making Progress?

THAT's the question to ask.

### The Next Right Thing

Just do that. Again and again.

### Virtue

Make it your goal.

### Discipline <--> Happiness

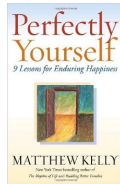
They go together.

### Simplify.

Simplify. Simplify.

### How Can I Serve?

Another genius question.



# Perfectly Yourself

9 Lessons for Enduring Happiness

BY MATTHEW KELLY · BALLANTINE BOOKS © 2006 · 222 PAGES

“Whether we are dealing with the area of health and well-being, relationships, finances, career, or spirituality, people want to advance. We have an enormous desire to grow and change and improve ourselves. *So why don't we?* I hear you ask. *What's the problem? Why is it that so many of us seem unable to transform resolutions into habits.*”

This book is about learning a new way.

The reason most of us fail to achieve real and sustainable change in our lives is because we focus too much on the desired outcome and not enough on the progress we are making. It is important to establish goals, but they can often seem overwhelming and impossible. If we can condition ourselves to focus on the progress we are making, our advances will encourage us to persevere in achieving our goals and dreams. It is when we lose sight of our progress that we become discouraged, and it is discouragement that often lands us back in our old self-defeating habits and self-destructive behaviors.”

~ Matthew Kelly from *Perfectly Yourself*

How'd you like to be [Perfectly Yourself](#)?

That (as you might have guessed from the title!) is what this book is all about.

Yesterday I created a Note on another one of [Matthew Kelly](#)'s great books, *The Rhythm of Life*.

I love his commitment to character + virtues-based living. And the fact that all his work points back to helping us become the-best-version-of-ourselves. (Plus, he's a great story teller.)

Matthew is also a passionate Catholic (check out his site: [DynamicCatholic.com](#)). Although I am not a practicing Catholic, I went to Catholic school for twelve years and I find a nice kinship with him. Whatever your religious orientation, I think you'll dig the book. You can get it [here](#).

As always, this book is packed with goodness. I'm excited to explore a handful of my favorite Big Ideas so let's jump in!

We'll start with a quick peek at those 9 Lessons for Enduring Happiness.

## THE 9 LESSONS FOR ENDURING HAPPINESS

1. Celebrate Your Progress
2. Just Do the Right Next Thing
3. Put Character First
4. Find What You Love and Do It
5. Live What You Believe

*“Regardless of what area of your life you would like to transform, I want to show you how we bridge the gap between our desire for change and actually creating real and sustainable change in our lives.”*

~ Matthew Kelly

"Think about it. In what moments over the past week or two were you at your very best? What were the contributing factors? How can you increase the number of those moments?"

~ Matthew Kelly

6. Be Disciplined
7. Simplify
8. Focus on What You Are Here to Give
9. Patiently Seek the Good in Everyone and Everything"

As you can imagine, there's a ton of goodness in those 9 Lessons.

Matthew dedicates a chapter to each in the book.

Now, let's look at a few of my favorites Ideas.

## ARE YOU MAKING PROGRESS?

"Are you making progress? It's an important question to ask ourselves: "Am I making progress?" I have not had much experience with being perfect, but I have had considerable experience with making progress. The reason I point this out is because when I am making progress, I am a happier person than when I am obsessing about some idyllic vision of perfection that I am falling short of. Progress animates us. It brings us to life. When we sense that we are making progress, we tend to be filled with passion, energy, enthusiasm, purpose, and a real and sustainable joy. Progress fills us with gratitude for the now and hope for the future. Progress creates enduring happiness."

This is the first lesson.

We need to value progress.

As you may have noticed, it's *really* easy to get ourselves all jacked up about an inspiring goal, go for it, and then feel a bit (or a lot) overwhelmed by the gap between where we are and where we'd like to be and then give up. D'oh.

(That ever happen to you? :)

The trick?

Matthew tells us to value the PROGRESS we're making.

Set the goals. *Know* it will take time to get there.

Then focus on the *process* of achieving those goals and celebrate the PROGRESS we're making. As you recognize and appreciate your progress, you will fill yourself up with passion, energy, enthusiasm, purpose, plus a real and sustainable joy.

We need to remind ourselves that, as [Darren Hardy](#) tells us in [The Compound Effect](#) (see Notes), it's the small, smart choices consistently applied over time that leads to HUGE results.

We just need to stay in the game.

Do that by showing up day in and day out and celebrate your progress.

Let's put the spotlight on *you*.

How can YOU celebrate your progress a bit more *today*?

Can you see how much you've grown over the last decade? The last year? The fact that you're actually a little wiser right NOW than you were just a few minutes ago?

Embrace that progress.

Celebrate it.

Use it as fuel for your journey!

*"In each moment, just do the next right thing and your life will begin to flood with joy."*

~ Matthew Kelly

## JUST DO THE NEXT RIGHT THING

"Whether you are struggling to overcome a pattern of defeat, yearning for inner peace, trying to create lasting happiness, wishing to succeed in your career, desperately trying to overcome procrastination, or are battling with an addiction, this lesson holds the key for you. Just do the next right thing. In each moment, just keep doing the next right thing. . . .

Whether you get into a funk, just do the next right thing. And keep doing the next right thing. You will be amazed at how quickly you work yourself out of the funk if you approach it this way. Don't worry about next week or next month or next year. Just do the next right thing and keep doing the next right thing, and gradually you will act your way out of destructive patterns. You cannot think or pray or wish or hope yourself out of the pattern that is holding you back. You must act your way out of it, one moment at a time.

One moment at a time, by simply doing the next right thing, you will move from confusion to clarity, from misunderstanding to insight, from despair to hope, from darkness to light, and discover your truest self."

*The next right thing.*

That's our second lesson to enduring happiness. I love it.

Want to flourish by living with areté as the Greeks advised?

*Just do the next right thing.*

Want to actualize your potential by stepping forward into growth as Maslow advised?

*Just do the next right thing.*

Want to simplify the entire process of optimizing our lives and actualizing our potential so we can change the world together?

*Just do the next right thing.*

It really isn't complicated. As Matthew tells us, we're not going to think or pray or hope our way out of behavioral patterns that aren't serving us. We need to *act* our way out of them. One moment and one action at a time.

You may say, "*But how do I know what the next right thing is?*"

Simple. Ask yourself!

99.9% of the time you KNOW. You may or may not choose to do what you know to be the right thing, but it's rarely complicated. (And we aren't helping ourselves by pretending it is!)

We're just too busy habitually, addictively reacting to life to even slow down long enough to ask the question and/or we're unwilling to follow that little wise voice in our head that's guiding us in the right direction.

But the solution remains simple: *Just do the next right thing.*

Right now. And now. And now. And... Watch your life transform!

## MAKE VIRTUE YOUR GOAL

*"Problems are opportunities to build character."*

~ Matthew Kelly

"Our lives genuinely improve only when we grow in virtue. Any other change is simply cosmetic. If we really want to improve ourselves, our lives, and our society, then we need to begin to switch the focus off money, celebrity, and talent and onto character and virtue.

Growing in virtue is the work of our lives. Everything that happens, everything we do is just an opportunity to grow in virtue. When the person in front of you is fumbling through her purse

*"Character is built one habit at a time. Good character is built one virtue at a time. Virtue is a good habit, a habit that leads us to become the-best-version-of-ourselves. The cornerstone of character is virtue."*

~ Matthew Kelly

to find the forty-nine cents for the cashier and you are beginning to get restless and frustrated, what's really happening? It's just an opportunity for you to grow in patience. Make virtue your goal, and you will find that the moments of the day come bearing the gift of opportunity."

We know that if we want to true, lasting happiness, we need to consistently express the highest version of ourselves.

We just talked about one way to do that: By just doing the next right thing.

What happens when we just do the next right thing?

We build our character. We build virtue.

Feeling impatient at the grocery store? Awesome. Do the next right thing.

Maybe that's taking a deep breath, appreciating the fact you're in a store that has THOUSANDS of products for you to simply throw into your shopping cart and swipe a card to buy. You could spend the couple minutes in line thinking of the incredible number of anonymous human beings who gave a part of *their* life so YOU could nourish yourself. (Wow.)

By doing that, you just strengthened not only your patience but also your sense of gratitude, love, and connectedness (all while boosting your immune system).

You built your character. Your virtue.

How does THAT feel?

A heck of a lot better than the alternative of impatiently looking at your cell phone, mumbling under your breath and thinking about how upset you are that it's taking a whole 90 SECONDS (gasp!) longer for you to get food for the \*entire\* week!!

Make virtue your goal and every.single.situation gives you another opportunity to rock it.

Build your virtue and your happiness is indestructible.

## DISCIPLINE <—> HAPPINESS

"You cannot be happy without discipline. In fact, if you want to measure the level of happiness in your life, measure your level of discipline. You will never have more happiness than you have discipline. The two are directly linked to each other. If you want to increase the level of fulfillment and happiness in a certain area of your life, increase your level of discipline in that area of your life. On the other hand, if you find that you are altogether too happy too much of the time, you may want to think about decreasing the level of discipline in your life. Discipline and happiness are directly linked."

You want more happiness?

Increase your level of discipline.

Period.

We talk about this all.the.time.

Science (unequivocally) says: Willpower, aka self-control, aka discipline, is THE greatest predictor of your well-being.

How's *yours*?

Take a quick inventory of your life.

Where are you most disciplined? Do you find you're most thriving in that area?

For example, your health. You disciplined there? If yes, odds are you're healthy. If not, odds are you're not as healthy as you could be/would like to be.

*"How much discipline is enough? The answer depends on how happy you want to be, and for how long you want that happiness to last."*

~ Matthew Kelly

How about your creativity? You disciplined there? Your finances? Your relationships? Your spirituality?

As Matthew playfully suggests, if you're feeling way too happy in your life, just dial back your discipline. That will do the trick and you'll be feeling cranky soon enough! :)

Discipline and happiness are directly linked.

And that's EXCITING. No matter what your current level of discipline, you can build your willpower/discipline muscles. You can pull the levers on your discipline and drive your well-being!

Let's!

## **SIMPLIFY. SIMPLIFY. SIMPLIFY.**

"Listen as I whisper three of the most powerful words in history into your ear. The great artists and scientists know the power of these words. Allow these three words to permeate every corner of your being and every aspect of your life, and you will live a life of such authenticity that has rarely been witnessed.

*Simplify. Simplify. Simplify.*

Which parts of your life are confusing, congested, or cluttered? Simplicity is the way to clarity."

Simplicity = magic.

Reminds me of [Emerson](#)'s wisdom on the power of pruning. He tells us: "As the gardener, by severe pruning, forces the sap of the tree into one or two vigorous limbs, so should you stop off your miscellaneous activity and concentrate your force on one or a few points."

Amen.

Da Vinci tells us: "Simplicity is the ultimate form of sophistication."

[Seneca](#) tells us: "Straightforwardness and simplicity are in keeping with goodness."

[Bruce Lee](#) tells us: "One does not accumulate but eliminate. It is not daily increase but daily decrease. The height of cultivation always runs to simplicity."

[Dan Millman](#) echoes this: "Avoid fragmentation: Find your focus and seek simplicity. Purposeful living calls for elegant efficiency and economy of effort—expanding the minimum time and energy necessary to achieve desired goals."

Simplicity seems so simple. Why do we tend to confuse ourselves with unnecessary complexity?

Matthew tells us: "We complicate our lives because we don't know what we want."

Are you complicating your life? Slow down, get clear on what you \*really\* want.

Simplify!

P.S. Henry David Thoreau once said, "Our life is frittered away by detail. Simplicity! Simplicity! Simplicity!" Apparently, Ralph Waldo Emerson replied that one would have sufficed. :)

## **HOW CAN I SERVE?**

"Amazing things begin to happen when we do what we can where we are. Each of us must find a way to serve. I try wherever possible to avoid using the word *must* when I am writing, but I use it emphatically here. Albert Schweitzer, the French medical missionary and Nobel Peace Prize recipient of 1953, expressed the same idea: "I am certain of one thing. The only ones among us who will ever be truly happy are those of us who have sought and found a way to serve."

*"The key to thriving in the midst of complexity is simplicity."*

~ Matthew Kelly

*"Let us not seek what is easy. Let us boldly seek what is possible."*

~ Matthew Kelly

The greatest shift in most of our lives will take place when we decide to make ourselves radically available to serve. The moment that the internal dialogue moves from the question "What's in it for me?" to the question "How can I serve?" we begin to rapidly move in the direction of discovering our mission in life. Until this shift takes place, it is impossible to embrace our mission, and so the universe will almost certainly keep it hidden from us."

*How can I serve? How can I serve? How can I serve?*

THAT's the question we want bubbling in our brains.

*How can I serve? How can I serve? How can I serve?*

Notice the feeling sense you have when you ask that question. Juxtapose that with "What's in it for me? What's in it for me? What's in it for me?"

(Note: Great recipe to stress yourself out: a) Make it ALL about you (ALL of the time!) and b) be super impatient. Does the trick every time! :)

How can *you* serve?

Your family? Your colleagues? Your clients (if you have them)? Your community? Your world? Your self?

Let's focus on finding more and more ways to serve those in our lives and *know* that the happiest among us will always be those who have sought and found a way to serve.

I'm honored to have the opportunity to serve you and appreciate your support in making that possible. Here's to creating enduring happiness in our lives as we celebrate our progress, just do the right next thing, cultivate virtue, simplify and have fun building our discipline muscles!

B

**Brian Johnson,**  
*Chief Philosopher*

If you liked this Note, you'll probably like...

[The Rhythm of Life](#)

[The Selected Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson](#)

[The Compound Effect](#)

## About the Author of "Perfectly Yourself"

MATTHEW KELLY



Matthew Kelly has dedicated his life to helping people and organizations become the-best-version-of-themselves! Born in Sydney, Australia, he began speaking and writing in his late teens while he was attending business school. Since that time, four million people have attended his seminars and presentations in more than fifty countries. Learn more + connect: [www.matthewkelly.com](http://www.matthewkelly.com).

## About the Author of This

BRIAN JOHNSON



Brian Johnson loves helping people optimize their lives as he studies, embodies and teaches the fundamentals of optimal living—integrating ancient wisdom + modern science + common sense + virtue + mastery + fun. Learn more and optimize your life at [brianjohnson.me](http://brianjohnson.me).