



The New Good Life: Living Better Than Ever in an Age of Less

John Robbins

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How do you define the good life? For many, success is measured not by health and happiness but by financial wealth. But such a worldview overlooks the important things in life: personal contentment, family time, spirituality, and the health of the planet and those living on it. A preoccupation with money and possessions is not only unhealthy, it can also drain the true joy from life.

In recent years, millions have watched their American Dreams go up in smoke. The international financial collapse, inflation, massive layoffs, and burgeoning consumer debt have left people in dire financial straits—including John Robbins, a crusader for planet-friendly food and lifestyle choices, who lost his entire savings in an investment scam. But Robbins soon realized that there was an upside to our collective financial downturn: Curtailed consumerism could lead us to reassess our lives and values.

The New Good Life provides a philosophical and prescriptive path from conspicuous consumption to conscious consumption. Where the old view of success was measured by cash, stocks, and various luxuries, the new view will be guided by financial restraint and a new awareness of what truly matters. A passionate manifesto on finding meaning beyond money and status, this book delivers a sound blueprint for living well on less. Discover how to

- create your own definition of success based on your deepest beliefs and life experience
- alleviate depression, lower blood pressure, and stay fit with inexpensive alternatives for high-cost medications
- develop a diet that promotes better health—and saves you money
- plan for—and protect yourself from—future economic catastrophes
- cut down on your housing and transportation costs
- live frugally without deprivation
- follow in the footsteps of real people who have effectively forged new financial identities

The New Good Life provides much-needed hope and comfort in a time of fear and uncertainty. Here is everything you need to develop high-joy, low-cost solutions to life's challenges. Practical and timely, this book equips you with the skills needed not only to survive but to thrive in these challenging times.

The New Good Life: Living Better Than Ever in an Age of Less Details

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Barb says

While this is all "old hat" for me, there were still snippets where I learned information! A/C on the non-sunny side saves energy (in retrospect, DUH! but it was a good reminder). Running the vent over the stove will "suck up" all the heated air in the house (again, in retrospect, YES! Of COURSE! but there it was - useful info!). Anyway, if you're not already a frugalista and you're looking at how to live lighter on the planet, save some money, and be healthy, this is a great compilation.

JoAnn Jordan says

This is an excellent book on living a good life while expending less and being kinder to the world. It is not so much a financial handbook as a guide to taking better care of yourself. It is about learning to live in harmony with your surroundings and others you contact.

The writer is a very interesting person and his life experiences are very enlightening.

I highly recommend the book. It is a quick read with a great deal of good information.

Linda Riebel says

This is a friendly, compassionate, and deeply heartfelt guide on how to live. Bringing together research and personal experience of key themes - money, food, home, time, kids - John Robbins maps out a set of values that can lead our country to a better life, even in a time when security seems far away.

"Better life" to me means healthier and happier, woven together with care for other people, animals, and our earth. In his life and in this book, John Robbins shows how it can be done. Every step he advises, he has taken himself.

I appreciate that he devoted a large segment of the book to "healing your relationship with money." So many people have little idea where their money actually goes, while others (both rich and poor) are lost in the illusion that "more money" is the answer to their problems. His lessons about making peace with money are wise indeed.

Many of the findings in this book have been reported elsewhere, but by bringing them together in an integrated way, Robbins paints a positive and possible picture of how to live. This is a book about today, neither a romanticized idyll of an easier past nor a prediction of a technologically-driven salvation in the future. It asks you to think hard about whether to have children, and how to guide them in an advertisement-crazed culture. Balancing alarming facts with inspiring ideas and examples of people who have made wise life choices, Robbins made this a deeply readable book.

Buy this book. Buy extra copies and give them to people you love, especially young people starting out in life.

Nancy says

Though I could accept why someone would want to turn their back on a large fortune and embrace voluntary simplicity, I just couldn't get over the fact that he could have used all that money and really made a difference in other folks lives with it. You don't want to own a Yacht named "The Thirty Second Flavor 2?" Fine! Then build a school in an impoverished nation - give to charities - create your own foundation and give it all away to those in need. Instead he just turned his back on the money and as far as I can tell, pretty much did nothing really for his fellow man. And then apparently accumulated quite a bit of wealth again and lost it all due to a really bad investment. Amazing how Karma works, doesn't it?

thewestchestarian says

We're all hippies now handbook. First, a warning to right-of-center readers, without irony John Robbins lays down some heavy thoughts like: *"it's not he who dies with the most toys that wins but he who dies with the most joys."* John named his son *"Ocean"* which narrowly beat out christening him "Kale" in honor of, yes, the vegetable of the same name. Basically, John makes former California Governor Jerry Brown look like former Senator Joe McCarthy.

If you can press through the Leo Buscala peace, love, and understanding seared crust, there is substantial meat here. Robbins' early chapters biography documents a life that included a fortune refused (Robbins repudiated his father's Baskin-Robbins ice cream wealth), a fortune earned (Robbins sold millions of diet books which likely don't feature steak tartar and ice cream) and a fortune stolen (Bernie Madoff made off with the second fortune). Perhaps unique among biographies, this one is actually too short and leaves some potentially intriguing areas unexplored. Were there times he regrets forsaking the ice cream money? Does he feel his amassed good karma should have prevented the theft of his book money or the tremendous challenges his twin grandchildren faced? How do you spend 10 years living in a handmade shack on an isolated British Columbian island and remain sane? These chapters are fascinating and are a must read.

However, you can skip the middle. After his life story Robbins gets down to the manifest purpose of the book: to teach the world's legion of newly minted paupers (how are you doing with that mortgage?) how to live like a hippy (*"the new good life"*). The advice differs inconsequently from what you could learn in an afternoon on Yahoo Finance. Like every diet book can be boiled down to *"don't eat so damn much"*, Robbins advice is not to spend so damn much. Not that the advice is bad, it is probably knowledge you already store in your head and don't apply to your daily life. The practical portion of Robbin's prescriptions becomes more and more pedestrian until it reaches its nadir with a sweet potato recipe (apparently they are cheap...and local and organic and free range and not tested on animals...).

Eventually Robbin's goes macro and redeems himself. In talking about the planet's deteriorating environment he willingly discusses the biggest taboo in the sea of environmental books – population control. Nearly without exception those out to *"save the planet"* dance around the fact that sustainably providing clean food, water and energy for the 7 billion humans already here is a near impossibility to say nothing of the 2-3 billion on the way over the next couple of decades. He also redeems himself by recognizing that nearly all the consumer products sold as *"organic"*, *"natural"*, *"pure"* or otherwise green are effectively conventional products greenwashed and marked up 25%. He takes pains to flag those products, particularly cleaning and cosmetic products, that actually are made of natural ingredients as well as to suggest natural replacements (apparently you can do just about anything with vinegar) to chemistry's grandchildren.

The final portion of the book is filler in the form of long-form platitudes about the earth, humans' place in it and how we interact with one another. The manifesto covers the full environmentalist platform but suggests

no new planks. Likely Robbins is more persuasive both in person and not at the end of an overlong treatise on the subject.

In short, read the early biographical stuff and skim the rest for topics of interest.

Ging Cee says

This was an extremely quick read. I remember seeing John Robbins on a documentary years ago. His story is inspiring, all the more so because the life he chose for him and his family was groundbreaking. I enjoyed reading this book because it summarized and rehashed a lot of ideas and concepts I've been exposed to in other readings, but in a digestible manner. I also learned a lot of new tips and tricks as well. Overall 3 stars, but 4 stars for all the organic cleaning recipes!!!

Daina says

I had high hopes for this book as I am very interested in leading a more simple and happier life. After struggling to get through the first half of the book, I told myself, well you are half done, just get through it. I will admit, I did skim a lot near the end just to get finished. I found Robbin's writing to be heavily based on personal experiences (and some where interesting the first time you read it) but he repeatedly brought up reference to the same experience, again and again and yet again! OK - we've got the point I would often tell myself.

I have read many books and articles in the field of personal finance and how to live life with less and I guess if you were VERY new to the subject, this book might give a mediocre (at best) foundation to the subject, but advice from someone who has been reading in this field for a few years now - don't waste your time.

shirley says

I picked this book based on the title, as I was interested in the subject.

It wasn't until I read the book that I realized the author was the sole heir to the Baskin Robbins fortune who then walked away and chose to live a frugal simple life. Big surprise. I started googling John Robbins and found out more about him.

This book is a powerful testimony of someone who practiced what he preached.

I love the part in the book where there are recipes for simple nutritious food.

Overall, I really enjoyed reading the book, and will re-read it again.

Vincent says

I went into this with high hopes but it's a pretty big letdown.

Because this Robbins guy stood to inherit a multi-million Baskins Robbins ice cream franchise, he is famous. He tells us he opted to say no to the money and instead live on an island in Canada. But he never gets into the nitty gritty of that. Will he dies penniless?

He and his wife have no skill or ability other than giving massages. Not a long term investment.

I was also disappointed that the vast majority of his guidance about living the simple life consists of the same stuff we hear everyplace else.

Use low energy light bulbs, eat local and organically, don't buy worthless crap at Costco, etc.

At the end of the day he can experiment plenty since he has \$50 million sitting in the bank waiting for him

Lisa says

I picked up The New Good Life on a whim. I didn't know who John Robbins was nor did I know his program Diet for a New America. Robbins, an heir to the Baskin-Robbins fortune, has experienced financial highs and lows. In The New Good Life he offers suggestions for how to create a life that brings you psychological security and happiness without all the trappings of our consumer culture. He examines how we've gone from being citizens to consumers and how that change has made us less happy, less satisfied and has put us at odds with the environment, when we're not out and out at war with it.

Beginning with his own story of creating wealth after having walked away from his family's money and business, and then loss of his life savings through no fault of his own except to have trusted an advisor who unwittingly turned the investments over to Bernie Madoff, Robbins gives a list and character sketch of money archetypes and explains how they relate to money and how they can find a better way to relate to money.

Robbins transitions to the practical by outlining how to learn where your money is spent, how much money you actually earn per hour and how you can re-examine and readjust your spending, save money and reduce your impact on the environment.

I was especially happy to find recipes for food and for making cleaning supplies. I've worried for a while that we're marinating in petro-chemicals each and every day and have wanted a comprehensive list of safe cleaning supplies and personal care items.

I recommend this book for its readability, practical information and for how it approaches the "new normal." As our family has adjusted to having half its income, we've found that some things are easy to do without while others are harder to let go. As we still live and work in a middle class world and have children attending school with peers whose families haven't been so negatively by this economy, we've struggled with meshing reality with old expectations. Do middle schoolers really need a full-color yearbook, for example. And don't get me started on electronics and gadgetry.

We've always known that we couldn't keep up with the Joneses, but now that we truly do not have the means to even try, we're learning how to find peace with this knowledge, to not compare ourselves and to understand that the life we have now can be full and satisfying without debt and within our means.

What I learned from John Robbins' book will help.

Rebecca says

Giving up his share of the Baskin Robbins empire and choosing to live a less materialistic life the author walks the walk. He shares his experiences, and ups and downs of life in an approachable way. There is no preaching or finger wagging which makes it feel more a believable and doable way of life.

Michael says

John Robbins's book Healthy at 100 was a real eye opener for me about food, diet, and health. So when I saw this new audiobook of his, I thought it worth listening to.

I think there's a correlation between where you are on the political spectrum and how much you'll like this book. It will likely have more appeal to those on the left, though it's message is one that Americans near to hear. For those who don't know the author, John Robbins left behind a fortune as the heir to Baskins & Robbins to instead live out in the wilderness for a time and escape capitalism. He has a wife named Deo and a son named Ocean.

Some of his ideas are quite practical; some you'll question; and some are far out but doable. He's not preaching so much as making suggestions and sharing his own experiences. I would take a different approach than he would on many points. For example, John shies away from all food that isn't healthy. But my approach is to use the tasty food (ice cream) as a treat to be enjoyed on occasion.

As the new good life encompasses a lot of territory, you'll hear John's thoughts about everything from critiquing consumerist culture, to money management, to how he lost most of his savings through the Madoff debacle, to cleaning with natural products, to his own life philosophy, and much more. I found the section on the scientific study of happiness very interesting. To paraphrase Zig Ziglar: We know that money doesn't bring happiness, but we all want to find out for ourselves. So I was delighted to find that scientists who study happiness have confirmed Zig's observation: after we get above the poverty level, there's low correlation between happiness and the amount of money you have. Now if I really believed that...

David Snook says

Twenty-five years ago, I saw a video based on another book by John Robbins, called "Diet for a New America". It changed my life -- I became a vegetarian for a year and then decided to go completely vegan, and I have been vegan to this day. John Robbins showed me that caring for animals and loving people can be aided by my daily choices around what I eat.

"The New Good Life: Living Better Than Ever in an Age of Less" is even more ambitious in scope, as it expands on the idea of sustainable food choices and adds to it the wider aspects of daily consumption, from the homes that we buy to the ways that we keep them clean, all with the same view towards sustainability and an awareness of the extended impact of these choices.

Now that I know, I will be making different choices, for the betterment of my own life and for the lives of others.

Dan says

This is a good source for reaffirming non-capitalistic beliefs. If you are already on that path I don't think anything in here will take you by surprise. but the conservation tone makes it easy to read and generally enjoyable. Sections of the book are structured more like tips and tricks which are more just information for skimming over. Not a bad book and it holds an important message.

Brittany says

I picked this up to see what Robbins recommended to live better on less, not to read his autobiography, so keep that in mind in reading my review. Anyone who has already been living on a budget, and I mean really and truly living on a budget to make ends meet, not skipping designer handbags and \$200 face cream so you can go to Bora Bora next Christmas, has already heard and done most of what Robbins suggests one would do to live a simpler, more frugal life. That part of the book is nothing new, unless you are new to living frugally, but at least it doesn't recommend anything too crazy like another book on the topic I read recently that suggested saving money on food by eating leftovers off another diner's table at restaurants!! For a saver who wants to leave no stone unturned, I guess this book would be worth skimming to make sure you've truly whittled away all of the excess fat from your budget. The chapter on food was more interesting, and included a couple of recipes that looked interesting (but I didn't try), but there are better books on the topic (see: Michael Pollan). Overall, probably worth checking out from the library like I did, but certainly nothing to spend the money or space on your bookshelf on.
