

Key Takeaways: *Happiness is a Choice You Make*

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Aging is a process where you explore the person that you have always should have been. Humans are resilient, and we have a lot to learn from older individuals, who have lived through a multitude of different experiences. The author of *Happiness is a Choice You Make*, John Leland, explores the invigorating lessons that six elders have to teach. Each elder John Leland interviews highlights beyond what it means to be old, but also life-changing lessons on resilience and joy after mastering the art of living themselves. This excerpt touches upon the six key life lessons that the reader can takeaway from each elder.

Lesson 1: Fred- *The Power of Gratitude*

Fred, an 87 year-old man who lives alone in his apartment takes life as it comes. He states his only purpose is to live, be happy, enjoy life, have a good time with friends, and go to church on Sundays. Fred was never extravagantly blessed with riches; he even jokes about never having a wife. Despite his circumstances, he has an overwhelming sense of gratitude. Fred teaches the beauty of giving thanks and the happiness it brings. He never blames anyone for his hardships, seeing them as opportunities to give thanks and love. Ultimately, life on earth was not supposed to be perfect, but gratitude accompanies suffering.

Lesson 2: Ping – *The Choice to be Happy*

Ping's life was not glamorous to say the least. Ping had almost nothing—her husband and two of her sisters were dead, her only son had been murdered, and she worked for years making below minimum wage and retired at close to eighty years-old. Despite these conditions, Ping is happy. Rather than taking on a “happy if only” mentality, she thinks “happy in spite of”; acknowledging her problems but doesn't put them in the way of happiness. She teaches readers to “think all beautiful things” and the power of choosing happiness. More importantly, she teaches the secret to long life: making yourself happy.

Lesson 3: John – *Acceptance of Death*

Neither sad nor happy about nearing the end of his life, John teaches the lesson of acceptance. Not to be fooled, John wasn't depressed or suicidal, in fact, he was happy and often spoke about relished memories of his life. He lived life exactly the way he wanted to, and now he wanted to move onto the next stage. Accepting death to John was accepting life and living in joy, no matter how dire the circumstances around you. John teaches readers that death doesn't devalue the days that are left, but rather it makes each day count more because there were so few left.

Lesson 4: Helen – *Learning to Love and be Needed*

Albeit subtle, Helen's lesson lies between her and two individuals who loved her—Howie and Zoe. Helen had two people in her life that dearly loved for her, but both demanded separate things and were locked in irreconcilable competition. Howie wanted to get married to

Helen, meanwhile Zoe wanted to be heavily involved with Helen's life. Rather than holding resentment, Helen chooses to embrace the life she is given. Never magnifying her unmet desires by treating them as a punishment, Helen teaches about finding happiness amongst the turmoil—never sacrificing the present for a future that may never come true.

Lesson 5: Ruth – *Nourishing the People that Matter*

Stubbornly independent, Ruth teaches readers the power of leaning on others and accepting love. Although insistent on doing things herself, Ruth felt grateful when her daughter Judy takes her to her appointments or when her other children visited. To Ruth, independence is a balancing act—finding a middle ground between maintaining control over her own life and also accepting help from her children without sacrificing their own lives. Neither independence nor dependence, Ruth teaches how to navigate through *interdependence*, meaning accepting help with gratitude and nourishing those who matter.

Lesson 6: Jonas – *Living with Purpose*

Jonas was anywhere and everywhere, constantly doing something and constantly finding a purpose. Whether it be reading from his unpublished novella or raising money to build a library and café, he constantly maintained a purpose in life. Rather than purpose being a cause of good health, it is seen as an effect of good health. Ultimately if individuals were to live as though the future were finite, the present becomes wonderful for life is truly amazing.

References:

Leland, J. (2018). *Happiness is a Choice You Make: Lessons from a Year Among the Oldest Old*

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