



## Arthur Brooks x Nicky Gumbel

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Arthur Brooks, a CEO-turned-Harvard professor with a class on the Science of Happiness, is best known for his *New York Times*-bestseller *Strength to Strength*, and also wrote *Build the Life You Want: The Art and Science of Getting Happier* with Oprah Winfrey. Here are some key insights shared by Arthur:

### FOUR HABITS OF THE HAPPIEST PEOPLE

#### 1. Faith

Faith is the basis for everything. The happiest people have a sense of the transcendent, whether traditionally religious or not, because left to our devices, Mother Nature will force us to become the star of our own psychodrama.

#### 2. Family

This is an easy thing to neglect for hard-charging strivers. It's crucial that we prioritise these relationships. I don't want just a cordial relationship with my family. I want the life-giving sustenance that a true family bond can bring.

#### 3. Friendship

There's more than one kind of friend. Busy, successful people have a lot of deal friends, not real friends. The greatest source of loneliness that people have is it's too much deal. If you're spending time focusing on your profession, you will be surrounded by people, but they won't necessarily take your 3:00 AM phone call. You must set aside time and do the work to maintain these relationships. Deal friends are incredibly useful to you, real friends are useless, beautifully cosmically useless. If you don't have enough useless friends, you're doing it wrong.

#### 4. Work that serves other people

What brings joy from work is earning your success, the belief that you're creating value with your life, and you're recognised for it, and that you're serving others. That you know who those people are and can see the result of your work. That's how service works, serving the people around you.

### LEADERSHIP

[Nicky:] No one should want to be a leader for the same reason that no one should want to be famous. Leadership's a hassle but if you want to do something, you're probably going to have to lead. [Arthur:] Certain people should actively avoid leadership. When **people get into the boss role**, their happiness decreases until about two years in, and their anger systematically rises because they have less control.

So, for certain people who have anger management issues, who tend toward loneliness – because it's isolating to be a leader – or who already are struggling with happiness, leadership is not the secret to making you happier. Service, not status is how you should think about leadership and happiness. Which is Jesus's model. We find in the data, that everything that the Lord taught stands up to modern social science. The best way I've ever found to execute on these truths, is to dedicate myself to the Saviour, to subjugate my will to the truth of the Christian Gospel.

## FLUID INTELLIGENCE VS CRYSTALLISED INTELLIGENCE

Our strengths change as we move through life. Early in life, we have a lot of what neuroscientists and social scientists call “fluid intelligence”. The ability to innovate, to think quickly, to use working memory, to focus, and to solve problems on our own. Fluid intelligence tends to peak at about age 40. The skills central to fluid intelligence decline naturally with age.

A second kind of intelligence rises in your forties and beyond: “crystallised intelligence”. It has to do with synthesising things you know and being able to express them. The ability to tell a story and teach people. We must step away from our innovator curve onto our instructor curve. That’s the natural progression.

[Nicky:] Who better to run a church than someone who’s got crystallised intelligence, a whole lifetime in the business world; as a doctor; but all their life, they’ve been in church and growing in maturity in their spiritual life? There’s massive potential in this group, which didn’t exist 50 years ago.

[Arthur:] To be a Christian is to live in the mission field no matter what you’re doing; to think about your life in a pastoral way. As you get older, [you’re] better at doing that because of the rise in crystallised intelligence. So, whether you’re a priest or not, you’re in a priestly profession and getting better at it as time goes by.

## ROUTINE AND MOOD

I want to ensure my body can support what I’m trying to do with my mind. Which for me means waking at 4:45, working out from 5:00 to 6:00 before I go to early mass at 6:45. It’s critically important because we find in the research that negative feelings are best managed through vigorous physical exercise.

One of the personality tests I find most effective is the **PANAS (positive affect, negative affect sequence)** test. Positive affect means good mood. Negative affect means bad mood. Different people genetically have a tendency toward high levels of good or bad moods.

**There are four possibilities and about a quarter of the population is in each quadrant.**

- 1. High negative affect, high positive affect (“Mad Scientist”)** is great for creativity and expression but can be exhausting for those around you.
- 2. High positive affect, low negative affect (“Cheerleader”)**, which people want to be, is great. You have trouble getting or giving bad news, which makes it tough to be an effective leader.
- 3. Low positive affect, high negative affect (“Poet”)** feels negative affect very deeply and that must be managed. But it also corresponds to high levels of creativity and all sorts of wonderful gifts.
- 4. Low positive affect, low negative affect (“Judge”)** is very sober, unflappable, and great in certain high-danger professions, like running a nuclear power plant or being a spy.

If you have a Mad Scientist or Poet profile, exercise is incredibly effective at managing the part of your personality that might be creating a barrier for overall wellbeing.

Exercise optimises my neurotransmitters, and the most important among them for focus and creativity is dopamine. The drugs that treat ADHD bring more dopamine into the prefrontal cortex. You can do that naturally, such that you have a greater period of focus. Caffeine is very effective for coaxing the dopamine along. I don’t drink it within the first 90 to 120 minutes that I’m awake for all kinds of reasons well documented in the neuroscience literature. Don’t drink your caffeine too early, or you’ll have a crash in the afternoon.

[After exercise and attending mass], I have a breakfast with my wife. And by 7:30, I am ready to go. Nothing gets into that slot: no Zoom calls, no conference calls, no nonsense. I’m working on my books, on my columns, I’m doing creative work, and I can usually get three rock solid hours of that, because my brain chemistry is right based on body and soul.

## GNOSTIC, EPICUREAN AND STOIC THOUGHT

We’re not Gnostics, we know that body and soul are fused in a mystical way. The idea of treating your body like a temple and not despising it is good for the work that you’re trying to do for the kingdom.

The Epicureans thought the way to do it was a lot of “make yourself happy”. Epicurus, the great Greek philosopher, had a belief that you should live a rigorous moral lifestyle, but largely absent tension anger.

That morphed in the modern parlance [into]: you should do things that feel good all the time. “If it feels good, do it” is one of the best ways to ruin your life very effectively and efficiently. Today, the version that we tend to see is “if it feels bad, make it stop”. That’s a huge mistake, catastrophic for happiness. Through suffering, we find meaning and through meaning, we can find one of the great sources of happiness.

The Stoics look at this in a different way. Making toughness a cult is highly problematic because you’re putting something over the greater good, as opposed to seeing the toughness and self-discipline that you’re bringing to subjugate yourself to the greater will. The discipline isn’t the point. The discipline is a means to the greater point, which is the glory of God in the world and being a servant in this world to His love and goodness for others.

## SEARCHING VS BEING SOUGHT

There’s a spiritual search in every human heart. To be a seeker, can lead you on kinds of interesting paths toward hallucinogenic drugs or extreme uses of exercise, or to cults etc.

I say I’m a Catholic, so I’m sought. This is the Christian difference. People don’t want to seek forever. People want to realise the cosmic truth that they are sought by pure love, and then everything changes. This turns out to be the bridge to a lot of young people that are seeking.

## LOVING OUR SUFFERING

Happiness has a great deal of unhappiness embedded in it. To be ultimately happy would be undesirable, even dangerous, because that would mean the absence of negative emotions and the full experience of human life. We would never learn and grow – the slightest concept of meaning, which is the coherence and the significance in our purpose, we wouldn’t know those things. Every part of happiness requires pushing through the struggles so that we can get to the transcendence that lies behind that struggle.

The most important thing that I teach my students at Harvard is for them to love their suffering. Then they’re one inch away from Christianity, because what is the essence of transcendence? It’s the man on the cross.

## LOVE IS THE ANSWER

The secret cheat code to happiness turns out to be encompassed in the Christian gospel and in common sense and all the research. And that’s basically that happiness is love. Love of the divine; love as refracted from God and our families and our friends; and love that we can bring to everybody through our sanctified ordinary work.

If there’s one thing to remember, it’s that we should just love and then do what we will.

For those interested in diving deeper into these topics, please check out Arthur’s workshop at [www.scienceofhappier.com](http://www.scienceofhappier.com). Using the code: **LC2024** will get you a discount of **40% off the premium workshop** at checkout until 01 March 2024.

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