

Reading Group Guide

*The Art and Science
of Getting Happier*

BUILD

the

LIFE

You

WANT

**ARTHUR C. BROOKS
OPRAH WINFREY**



BUILD *the* LIFE *You* WANT

Reading Group Guide

- 1 In her opening note, Oprah points out that though many of us wish to be happy, few of us can describe exactly what happiness actually is. Often we take highlights from other people's lives and meld them together into our picture of what a happy life seems to be. At the start of the book, when you thought of a "happy life," what images came to you?
- 2 What are some common myths about happiness? Have you ever pursued a goal designed to make yourself happy only to remain unhappy once you'd achieved it? Why do you think your achievement failed to make you happy?
- 3 Arthur and Oprah argue that "unhappiness is not the enemy." What do they mean by this? How can unhappiness be beneficial? Think of a time when you were very unhappy but that led you to learn and grow as a person.
- 4 In Chapter One, you learned about the three "macronutrients" of happiness: enjoyment, satisfaction, and purpose. What are the main sources of enjoyment, satisfaction, and purpose in your life today?
- 5 Calculate your natural mix of happiness and unhappiness using the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) on pages 14–16. Are you a Cheerleader, Mad Scientist, Poet, or Judge? Were you surprised by your result?
- 6 A key tool in becoming happier is metacognition: the act of recognizing and managing your emotions. Describe a situation in your life that would have been improved if you'd noticed your emotional reaction and chosen your response. If you've already begun practicing metacognition, share your results with the group.
- 7 Science shows that practicing gratitude is one of the most effective ways to increase positive emotions. In that spirit, share something for which you are deeply grateful.
- 8 What is the difference between empathy and compassion? Why do Arthur and Oprah argue that compassion is superior to empathy?
- 9 In Chapter Four, you learned about your two selves: the "I-self" (the observer of things around you), and your "me-self" (the one who is observed by others). Do you tend to spend more time as your I-self or your me-self? Does your me-self feel like a different person? What steps could you take to begin focusing less on how others see you and more on the world outside yourself?

- 10 From classic literature like Dante's *Divine Comedy* to cutting-edge neuroscientific research, there is plenty of support for the idea that envy is a major happiness killer. Have you experienced envy in the past six months? How did it affect your emotional state?
- 11 According to Arthur and Oprah, the four pillars of happiness are family, friendship, work, and faith (or life philosophy). Which of those four areas is the strongest for you today? Which is the weakest?
- 12 Think about your weakest pillar. What habits could you adopt to strengthen it?
- 13 Research shows that the happiest couples aren't the most similar but instead the most complementary, such as introverts and extroverts or Cheerleaders and Poets. Does that finding surprise you? Can you think of a couple who embodies this kind of healthy difference?
- 14 Arthur and Oprah argue that emotional contagion—that is, the spread of emotions from person to person—can create a lasting culture within a family. How would you describe the emotional culture in your family? How would you like to see it change?
- 15 Do you have a lifelong real friendship? How have you been able to maintain your friendship through the years? How has this friendship changed the course of your life?
- 16 In a 2022 survey about work, 16 percent of employees were “very satisfied” with their work, 37 percent were “somewhat satisfied,” and the remaining 47 percent said they were “somewhat dissatisfied,” “very dissatisfied,” or “just glad to have a job.” How would you answer this question?
- 17 If you are somewhat or very dissatisfied with your job, Arthur argues that you should set goals to achieve intrinsic rewards—that is, the fulfillment and enjoyment you get when you do your work. What goal would help you increase your intrinsic rewards?
- 18 In Chapter Seven, you learned about four different career paths: linear, steady-state, transitory, and spiral (pages 160–161). Which of these paths best describes your career? Are you surprised to learn this about yourself?
- 19 Research shows that religious belief is strongly associated with a sense of meaning and purpose in life. What does religious belief mean in your life? Where do you find connection with the transcendent?
- 20 Oprah writes at the end of the book that “happiness multiplies when we share it.” What is one lesson from *Build the Life You Want* that you plan to go out and share with others?

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