



Build the Life You Want: *The Art and Science of Getting Happier*

Dr. Arthur C. Brooks

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Thank you. Thank you, Taylor and Paul and Natalie and Gary, and all of my friends here at BYU, and also to the University of Utah. I'm delighted to be back here. This is a place I've been honored to visit many times; going all the way back to about 2005, I started coming to BYU. Gary Cornea, the former dean of the business school here, brought me to BYU for the first time, and he was on a sabbatical year at Georgia State University where I was also teaching at the time. He said, "You have to come and visit BYU. It's going to be a singular experience." And he was not wrong. This is a special place. I also love the experience that I'm having at the University of Utah as an impact scholar. It's a real honor for me. Part of the thing that I'm learning is that this is a distinctive place in our country and in our world, and a big part of what I want to do is I want to bring the magic that's right here, and I want to bring it to the rest of the country. That's important. That's the missionary zeal of cultural transformation. And I want to be your representative to the rest of the world. And I want to talk to you a little bit about that today.

Now, when people ask what I do for a living, that's the icebreaker question in America. "What do you do?" Kind of indiscreet, because it sort of implies, "What do you do for money?" That's not a really polite question, but you answer with your job. And I say, "Well, I teach at Harvard University." They say, "Oh, where, which departments?" I say, "I teach at the Harvard Business School." They say, "Oh, finance, accounting, marketing, supply chain management, something practical like that, is it?" I say, "No, no, no—I teach happiness." And they think I'm lying. Why? Because that doesn't seem like something dignified to treat like a science and elevate into a business curriculum. Most people think that's a really weird thing to study, as if it were some sort of self-improvement. No, no, no. I teach the science of happiness: neuroscience, social psychology, behavioral economics, and the strategies that people can use to elevate themselves and lift other people up in the sanctified vocation that is the privilege of their work. I want to tell you a little bit about that today. Not because you don't know the things I'm about to tell you, but maybe I'll remind you of some ideas that you can use and give you some new ideas in your own work. What a privilege it is for me to bring some of the ideas that I see born out: the witness to which I see in the work of so many people right here. There's a reason this is called Happy Valley. Let me tell you a little bit about the science behind Happy Valley right now.

Now, my class at Harvard Business School is an elective course. I have 180 students enrolled. I just finished my semester. There were 400 on the waiting list this year. They also had an illegal Zoom link they think I was not aware of. But by the third week, their parents were on the Zoom link. Why? Because this is what everybody wants. It's not me; it's the subject. Everybody wants to be happier. It's part of human life to strive to be a happier person. Me too—all of us. The question is, how do we do it? Now, on my first day of class, I bring them in and they're sitting there as two sections of 90. And I always start with the same question: "What is it? What's happiness? You must know if you're taking a class in happiness; you know what accounting is when you start your accounting class." And then I could call them. You know what that is? That's what we do at Harvard where you pull people out of the class and say, "You—answer." It does not make them happy, trust me. And they always say the same thing one after the other. "Happiness is the feeling I get when I'm with the people I love," or "happiness is how I feel when I'm doing what I enjoy." And I say, "That's beautiful. That's lovely. That's wrong." Happiness is not a feeling, and that's very good news.

Happiness has feelings associated with it, but the feelings are not the happiness. Think of it this way. If you went home for Thanksgiving, opened up the front door, smelled that familiar smell of a Thanksgiving dinner that was so warm and inviting, and then your mother said, "You love the smell?" You said, "Yes." "Take it all in, because that's the whole dinner."

I'd be very disappointed. Why? Because the smell is evidence of what you're about to enjoy. And that's the same thing with happiness and feelings. Feelings are evidence of happiness, and you should be very grateful for that. If your happiness were a question of feelings, you'd be chasing feelings for the rest of your life. And in point of fact, that's what most people do. And that's the reason they're so frustrated. "I sure hope I feel happier tomorrow." I don't want to leave it up to chance. I don't want to leave it up to the things going on around me that are going to give me positive and negative emotions and just hope for the positives and try to get rid of the negatives. No, that's no way to live. Furthermore, it's not even a safe way to live. Getting rid of your negative emotions is dangerous. You need them—to keep you safe and keep you alive. That's part of being alive. Suffering is part of life. So I need a better definition of happiness that I can actually pursue in a straightforward way. That I can study and that I can change my habits around and that I can share with other people. And that's what I want to talk about. I want to define happiness. And if I do my job in about half an hour, I want to give you a bunch of strategies so that you can pursue it more meaningfully and more strategically and seriously for the rest of your lives.

So let's start with a straightforward definition. Now, if I said, "Okay, what is your Thanksgiving dinner?" You might say, "Well, it's turkey and stuffing and potatoes." Or you might give me a bunch of ingredients. Or if you're kind of a nutrition nerd like me, you'd say, "Thanksgiving dinner is like all

food: protein, carbohydrates, and fat.” That’s not very romantic. “Pass the fat, Mom.” That doesn’t sound like dinner, but that’s literally true. Those are called macronutrients. All food is based on a macronutrient profile that’s threefold. Now, I’m not here to give you a nutrition lecture. I’m talking about happiness. And the reason I say that is because it’s a perfect metaphor for happiness. Happiness has three macronutrients.

You need all three in balance and abundance to have good happiness health. Alright, here they are. Happiness is a combination of enjoyment and satisfaction and meaning. That’s what happiness is. And if you’re going to be a happier person this year than you were last year, I’m not going to say that you’re going to be happy in some cosmic sense, because happiness is not a destination: it’s a direction. You’re not going to be perfectly happy in your life, at least on this side of heaven. I’m hoping on the other side, yeah. But not now. What you can get is happier, by understanding the science of enjoyment and satisfaction and meaning. So let’s talk about these three and how you can get more of them.

That starts with understanding what these things are. They might seem straightforward. They’re not. Enjoyment, for example—classic case. What’s enjoyment? People say it’s feeling good or pleasure. That’s wrong. Pleasure is an animal phenomenon. Enjoyment is a human phenomenon, almost a divine phenomenon. You know, back in the 60s, the hippies used to say, “If it feels good, do it!” Right? I remember my father hearing that and about 1969 and saying, “That’s the end of America.” He was kind of right. Anyway, he was right on so many things, it turns out, in retrospect. But that’s actually a perfect strategy—if it feels good, do it. A perfect strategy for ruining your life. Why? Because that’s living the same way that your dog lives, the lower organisms live. Pleasure is an impulse that’s nothing more than a signal that something could help you survive and pass on your genes. That’s all pleasure is.

Now to understand this, we need to understand a little bit of the structure of the human brain and how it functions. The human brain is divided up basically into three categories of functions. At the lowest level of evolution is the detection category, where you’re doing autonomic things that you’re not thinking about. Right now I’m breathing and walking while I’m talking, and I can do all three because my lower order—at least, evolved parts of my brain—are allowing me to do that. It’s good news. The lower order parts of my brain are making me detect signals right now as well. I can see there’s about 800 people or so. I can see the light. I can detect, more or less, the temperature in the room. I’m assuming because of this autonomic set of functions, that you’re not a physical threat to me right now. So I’m relaxed. What is that all about? That’s sending signals automatically in the same way that it would be if I were a lower order animal. A snake or a lizard could do that too.

That sends information to the second part of my brain, which is called the limbic system. The limbic system was developed between 2 and 40 million years ago. We have that in common with all the mammals; that takes these outside signals and turns them into emotions, feelings, cravings and desires. That's what that whole console of tissue is dedicated to doing. When somebody says "good and bad" feelings, they have it wrong. There's no such thing as bad feelings. There's positive and negative emotions that are dedicated to telling you if something is a threat or an opportunity. That's it. You should not think about having fewer bad feelings. It's just data. It's just information.

The third function comes with what you do with your emotions. What do you do with that data? You send them to the most human part of your brain that's only been in its current state for 250,000 years. That's the neocortex, the wrinkly outside of your brain. It's wrinkly because it's a one-square-meter piece of tissue scrunched up inside your cranium. The most advanced part is called the prefrontal cortex. That's a bumper of brain tissue right behind your forehead. It's 30% of your brain by weight. That's the C-suite of your brain. That's the executive centers of your brain. You're listening to me and thinking about what I'm saying using your prefrontal cortex. Now, the data that it's getting is coming from your limbic system. The data to the limbic system is coming from your autonomic functions. And this is happening all day long: detection, emotion, decision. It's amazing. It's an incredible miracle. There's no computer on the face of the earth—or that will ever exist on Earth—that can come anywhere near the creation that is inside your head. It's happening all day long.

Now, here's the thing about pleasure. Pleasure is limbic. It's that second thing. It's something that says this will make you survive another day. It'll make it more likely for you to pass on offspring. That's all that pleasure is. You can't live that way because you'll be tapping pleasure centers all day long, and that won't lead you to happiness—that'll lead you to addiction. That's the problem with the, "If it feels good, do it." But that doesn't mean the pleasure is bad. It just means it's incomplete as a life goal. If you want it to lead to happiness, you need to add two things to the sources of your pleasure: people and memory. If you say pleasure plus people plus memory, then you experience that pleasure in your prefrontal cortex, and you can manage it and remember it.

That's what you're trying to do at Thanksgiving dinner. That's why you don't eat your turkey by yourself in your apartment, because that would be weird. You have it with your family. That's where enjoyment comes from. Beer companies never do commercials with a guy alone pounding a 12 pack in his apartment by himself. Never. Why? Because that's pathetic. Because that's dangerous; that's sad; that's not a happy thing at all. They have beer commercials of people drinking beer with their friends. Why? Because they're making the claim that beer plus people plus memory equals

enjoyment, and that leads to happiness. Now, I don't drink beer, and many of you don't either (I hope). But all things in your life that bring pleasure and that could lead to addiction will hurt you if you do them alone. That's kind of the rule of thumb. If I find you in Las Vegas at 4:00 in the morning pulling the lever on the slot machine by yourself, we're going to have a talk because that means you're doing it wrong. You're stopping too early. This is an important thing with your eating and with all of your habits. It's the pleasure, plus the people, plus the memory that leads to enjoyment. And that enjoyment leads to your happiness. And that's a gift. That's part one.

Okay, now that gave me an excuse to talk to you a little bit about the human brain, and I'm going to use that knowledge for part two, because now the plot thickens. Satisfaction. You all think you know what satisfaction is, but let's define it: it's the joy that you get after you struggle for something. It's the weirdest human thing. I have a dog. His name is Chucho. He's a good boy. He does not want to struggle for his rewards. He would lie down and eat if he could. You, on the other hand, fellow humans, you want to struggle for things. You want to even suffer for things. And the reward is sweeter the more you struggle. This is very hard to explain how this came about, but you know it's true. If you never had to study one single minute, you walked into BYU and you walked out ten minutes later with a diploma, it'd be like, okay, I could use that, but it wouldn't be sweet because it wouldn't be hard. You didn't work for it. My students could very easily cheat on their exams and get an A, but they wouldn't get any satisfaction. I told my kids when they were little—your parents told you when you were little—don't eat in the afternoon. Don't snack before dinner because you'll spoil your dinner. Spoil your dinner? What does that mean—spoil your dinner? It means you won't enjoy your dinner; if you don't have a little hunger, the food is no good.

My father-in-law is now of recent blessed memory. He passed away at 89. He was born 1929. He lived, he grew up, in Barcelona. He spent his entire life in Barcelona. And he lived through the Spanish Civil War from 1936 to 1939. He was a little kid and he suffered a lot. His family suffered a lot. He spent a couple of years in a refugee camp in France. He had family members who were assassinated. They were on the wrong side of that struggle. And it was terrible for him. But all of his points of cultural reference always were about the Spanish Civil War. He would talk about it constantly. This was this formative set of experiences. So anytime he would tell me about something, he would refer to that. One time he says to me, "You're an expert in happiness, right?" And I say, "Some say so." He said, "You want to know why people aren't happy anymore?" And I said, "I would very much like to know why people aren't happy anymore. I very much would like to know your opinion about why people aren't happy anymore." He says, "Because they never enjoy their dinner. I said, "That's it? That's your whole theory? Explain." And he said, "They don't enjoy their dinner because they're never hungry." He said, "In my day, during the Spanish Civil War, the best day of the year was Christmas Day, because we got to eat everything that we wanted. We literally saved up food the entire autumn and we would eat it all on Christmas. It was the only day of

the year that we weren't hungry and it was just wonderful. I remember every Christmas growing up and now the kids get to Christmas dinner and say, 'I don't want that. I don't like that.' Why? Because they've been munching on stuff all afternoon, and they're less happy because they didn't suffer."

Now, I don't want hunger in the world. But I take the point. I take the point that we need suffering, don't we? That the reward is that much sweeter. Hold that thought, because suffering is no joke, and understanding it in our own lives is something that we need to get on our own path to happiness. If the hippie said, "if it feels good, do it," and they were wrong, to say "if it feels bad, make it stop" is equally wrong. For this reason, you need to suffer. More on that in a second.

Now, the paradox of needing to struggle is weird enough, but the mystery gets even deeper after you get your satisfaction because you think—you're assuming—that if something happens that you worked for, you struggled for, and that you got, and it's so sweet that you're going to enjoy it forever. But you're not, you know, perfectly. Mick Jagger and the Rolling Stones sing, "I can't get no satisfaction." That's not right. You can get it. You wouldn't try and try and try as the song goes, if you couldn't "get no satisfaction." The problem is you can't keep "no satisfaction." That's the problem. And you never really figure it out. If I get the car, I'm really going to love it. If I get the house, if I get the watch, if I get the status, if I get the million Instagram followers, if I get the money, if I get the promotion. You know, it's funny, people often say commonly in our society, "If you marry me, you'll make me happy for the rest of my life." It doesn't work that way. It might—but not because you said yes to marrying me, but because we worked on it together for the rest of our lives. The single event doesn't last in the satisfaction that it brings. But we're always fooled. We're always fooled into thinking that it will because Mother Nature is playing a trick on us. Mother Nature is funny. She has two goals for us: survival and gene propagation. One of Mother Nature's goals is not your happiness. She does not care if you're happy. That is, the happiness that you enjoy in your life is not part of Mother Nature's animal path. That's part of the divine path in your life. And that means you need to stand up to Mother Nature, stand up to your desires, stand up to your cravings. And this is a perfect case in point. She makes you think that if this good thing happens to you, you'll enjoy it forever and be happy and blissful and it'll be just so great. The money, the power, the pleasure, the fame. But it's not true. It's temporal at best. What do we do about that? What do we do about that little thorny problem in our happiness lives?

It turns out there is something that we can do if we're courageous and willing to stand up to Mother Nature's tricks. Here's what we do. The formula that's inside your head for happiness and satisfaction is to have more. More of what? More of all of it. More of the Earth's rewards, the worldly goals that the marketing colossus—that the economy in our culture and mostly Mother Nature—bring to us: more of the money, more of the promotions and the prestige and the admiration of other people; more of it—and then we'll finally get satisfaction. But that doesn't work,

as I just mentioned. That leads to what we call the hedonic treadmill. That's a term of art for social scientists. Hedonic means feeling. The treadmill is that you can't keep it, because you're always running against the treadmill. You get ahead by one inch, but if you just stop, you go backwards and have to keep running. That's the reason that after billionaires make their first billion, they're unsatisfied and they conclude they need another billion. That's the hedonic treadmill. And that's the tyranny of Mother Nature. That's actually an illusion that you can break if you think about a better formula. Your satisfaction is not all your haves; your satisfaction is a function of all your haves, divided by your wants.

Haves divided by wants—imagine that little fraction inside your head. Now, one way to increase satisfaction is to increase the haves: the numerator. But that's inefficient and temporary. Here's the real secret: manage the denominator. Manage your earthly wants. If you have a wants management strategy, that actually lasts. That's efficient and permanent. But it doesn't come naturally. You know people, they don't want to do that. "I don't want to manage my wants. I want more haves. I want to have more." But if you have a strategy for this, then the world really changes a lot. Every religion has taught this, by the way; you've learned this in Sunday School since you were a child. But we have to put it into practice in practical ways.

So let me give you a suggestion. When I was a much younger man, I used to have a bucket list. You know what a bucket list is? It's a metaphor. The bucket is a metaphor that holds all of your worldly ambitions and cravings and desires. And on your birthday, you'd make a list of all these things, and then you imagine yourself just enjoying everything in the bucket, and that will motivate you to do more; that's the whole idea. The problem is that it makes you feel inadequate because it's blowing up the denominator in that fraction I just told you about and makes you want more even though you have less.

Here's what I do now. I have a reverse bucket list that I use. And here's how it works. On my birthday—and I've got a big one coming up in May, has a zero on it (it's not 70, no). I have a reverse bucket list where I take all my cravings and desires. And just like you, I have the same—I'm not some sort of enlightened Dalai Lama-like character. It's not like I've been able to beat all of my desires once and for all. I want the same things everybody else does. So I'm honest with myself. I have an examination of my conscience. I write down all those things, and then I cross them out. That's my reverse bucket list. It doesn't mean I'm not going to get those things. Lovely things come to me all the time, and you too. The point is, I don't want those things to be governed by my limbic system. I want to move the management of the desires into my prefrontal cortex, where I can manage the desire, and the desire does not manage me. Now, there's lots of things that can go on that reverse bucket list. One of the things that I'm putting on my reverse bucket list this year is a bunch of my political opinions.

Why? Because they're holding me back. They're an attachment. I'm too attached to being right, I will be honest with you. And many people are. Maybe you are too. People treat their political opinions as if they were, you know, jewelry. "Get between that. Get between me and my political opinions. Do you disagree with me, man? You're canceled." It's terrible in America today, if you haven't noticed. So I'm going to take my political opinions and I'm going to cross them out. I need fewer political opinions because I need more friends, and it's going to help. I'm going to be free. Not that I don't hold the opinions. I still hold the opinion. The point is, I'm not attached to the opinions; I'm not attached to being right. That opens me up and it opens my heart to you if you disagree with me. And I'm going to be happier; I'm already happier just thinking about it because I've really already started that reverse bucket list. That's the secret to lasting satisfaction. That's two.

Here's three. You thought those were complicated? Now three gets more complicated, the most of all, because it's meaning. Do you have adequate meaning in your life? We're going to find out right now. Now, meaning is the "why" questions in life. And there's a lot of research that goes into the mental health crisis, especially among young adults. Virtually all of it comes down to an inadequate understanding of the "why" questions in our lives. It's really difficult—particularly in your 20s when you can't answer certain questions—to feel that life is going in a direction that's meaningful, and that's difficult. That's difficult to manage intellectually, spiritually, emotionally, and psychologically. Now, it's too big a question to ask, what's the meaning of life? But you better have some sort of an answer.

This really comes down to three questions about coherence. Why do things happen the way they do? Got to have a theory of that. What's the significance of my life? Does it matter that I'm alive on this earth? And purpose. Purpose is a subcategory of meaning. That's your goals and direction in life. I can boil this down to really two questions. I'm going to give you a two-question exam to interrogate whether or not you have adequate meaning in your life. Okay. This is the exam I give my students. My average student is 28 years old, and a lot of them are suffering. And they figure out why when I give them this exam. Now, there are no right answers to this exam, except not having answers. Real answers, not answers you'd give your mom or the press. These are the answers to these questions that are written on your heart. If you don't have answers and you flunk the exam, it's okay because now you know what to look for, and that's good news if you're feeling a little empty.

Question number one: why are you alive? You need an answer. Now, two ways to answer that question are to ask who created you or for what reason? I recommend having an answer to both. Second question. Now it gets a little bit more difficult. For what would you give your life on this day if you were called to do so?

A lot of people don't have answers to that. A lot of young people in particular. What is your answer? If you don't have an answer—once again, good news—this is what to go in search of. When you see somebody find the answers to those questions, it's like watching a miracle unfold in front of you, the transformation. I've given that exam to my own kids. My kids are 25, 23, and 20. Like a lot of you here in this room. And, you know, given that I'm a father of three children, this by process of basic arithmetic says that I have a middle child, right? His name is Carlos. Carlos is my problem child. If any of you are in the middle child, call your mother and apologize. And, you know, with my kids, it was always—I mean, there's always some sort of a crisis—but with Carlos, it was this constant not living up to his potential. I mean, we had sort of a frequent flier program into the principal's office when he was in high school because it was always the same thing: Carlos is getting a D in math. Carlos is failing history. Carlos didn't show up for school today, and it was just, you know, grades, problems. And finally my wife, she's such an optimist, says, "At least we know he's not cheating." I mean, it was just, you know. But here's the pitiful part: he wasn't even enjoying himself. He didn't know where he was going. He was aimless, like so many adolescents. So here's what I do with my kids. See, I'm a "B" school professor, so I get to do this. When my kids are 18, they have to write a business plan. A business plan for their life. They are entrepreneurs. They are startup founders of themselves, incorporated. That's their firm. They're the founding CEO. Now, the currency of their life is not money. It's love and happiness. I am their venture capitalist. And if I'm going to invest, I deserve a business plan. Fair is fair. So I make them write a business plan. My oldest son wrote a great business plan. My daughter, when she came along, she did too. But when Carlos's turn came to write his business plan, it was just terrible. It was just unoriginal: I'm going to go to college and I'm going to play some sports. "No, you're not," I said, "No, you're not." He said, "How do you know, Dad? How do you know?" I said, "You want to know how I know? Because I'm Carlos, and I did it wrong."

When I was 18 years old, I did what I was supposed to do. I went to college. And ten months later, I was not in college anymore. I was encouraged to pursue my excellence outside the college. (You know, you get my drift, right?) And so I did what I had to do to make a living, because at that point, you know, I was, as they say, I was not raised with nice things. And my dad said, well, good luck to you. Let me know how you decide to make a living. And I did what I had to do, and I made my living as a musician of all things. I was a classical musician all the way through my 20s. I played on the road; I was a chamber musician; then I played with a jazz guitar player named Charlie Byrd for a couple of years; and then I was in the Barcelona Orchestra for a bunch of seasons in Barcelona, where I married my wife. My parents called it my gap decade, which went over real big. You can imagine that they thought it was very funny, too. And by the end of that, I was actually ready to study. I went back to college in my late 20s. I went to college by correspondence. I never set foot inside a classroom. Because I was poor, I did my entire bachelor's degree for \$10,000, including the books, in today's dollars.

It was tricky, I have to say, but it was incredibly empowering because I did it my own way. So when Carlos comes to me and says, “I’m just going to go to college and then I think I’m going to clean up my act,” and I’m like, “No, you’re not. Do better.” I sent his business plan back for revisions. And it came back with something I could actually believe in, because the whole point of the business plan is, how are you going to answer your questions?

Why am I alive? And for what am I willing to give my life? He came back with this idea of working: hard, by himself, with his hands, outside. He went to work on a dryland wheat farm in Grangeville, Idaho. Maybe some of you have been there. Maybe you’re from Idaho. Idaho’s great. Grangeville’s far away. And he did that for a season and a half, pulling rocks out of the soil and mending fences and tearing down, or taking down dead trees. And it was hard work. And then the second part of his business plan came along: he joined the Marine Corps. My son enlisted in the Marine Corps. Boot camp, infantry training battalion, in dock for the scout sniper platoon. My son was a special operations marine. He was a sniper for four years. This was a scary job for me as a dad. When I can’t track his phone, I know he’s out of the country. He’s on a field trip. Scary for a parent, but good for a boy. He came back after four years, and he was a man. And he had answers to his questions.

He got out of the Marine Corps four months ago. He’s living in Northern Virginia with—he’s 23 years old, he’s married, his wife is pregnant, and he’s got answers. Want to know them? These are not your answers necessarily. These are my son’s answers. These are an example. “Carlos, why are you alive?” “Because God made me to serve other people.” “For what are you willing to give your life?” “For my faith, for my family, for my fellow Marines, and for the United States of America.” Boom. Mic drop. Good boy. I’m proud of my son. And I’m not saying it’s because he has the right answers for you, I’m saying he has the answers for him. You have yours? Look, I’m a social scientist, and I’m here to tell you that that’s the way to find your sense of meaning; that’s the way to find your why. And the day that you’re convinced of those answers, your life will change.

Now that’s meaning. And that’s number three. And now I want to tie it up by being a little bit more practical because I want to give you some strategies you can talk about and start using today to get those three things: more enjoyment, more satisfaction, more meaning, more now. Because you deserve it, and you can get it—but you need strategies for doing so.

That raises a question: why are some people just naturally happier than others, notwithstanding the fact that they could have more or less the same lives? And the answer is that they have different metabolisms for their happiness. I could give any two of you the same Thanksgiving dinner, and one of you would gain more weight than the other, because you have different metabolisms for calories.

Metabolisms are based on genetics and circumstances and habits. And the same thing is true for your happiness. Your genetics matter a lot, and so do your circumstances, but especially your habits. Your genetics are about 50% of your baseline happiness. 50%. Maybe that's depressing to you. Ironically, it shouldn't be. That should be empowering. Because if you know that you come from kind of a gloomy family, you can manage your habits more effectively. But you have to know yourself. Data, how do we get this? We get this from studies of identical twins who were separated at birth and adopted into separate families. And then we look at their personalities when they're 40 years old. And there's a perfect statistical method that we've been able to develop to decide what part of their personality is genetic and what part is their circumstances. And 50% of their happiness is genetic. It's true. Your mother literally made you unhappy or happy. Depends on the mother, I suppose. And you. But here's the thing. You also find in this data that the tendency to abuse drugs and alcohol is 50% genetic. But if any one of you came to me and said, "I got a problem, Professor Brooks, I got a problem." "What's your problem?" "Well, you know, my mom and my dad, they drank too much and all four of my grandparents. I'm doomed. I'm going to drink too much." I say, "I have a secret, special technique that can turn that genetic tendency to zero. Here it is. Secret technology: don't drink." Right? That's habits. Habits are powerful, but you have to know your tendencies.

Okay, now the second part of your general happiness level is circumstance. And most people think circumstances are everything. If I can get the job, if I can get the promotion, if I can get the career, if I can get the marriage, if I can get the kids, just get those things, and happiness will fall into place on its own. But you know, it's not true, because of this hedonic treadmill: this tendency to have nothing last in your satisfaction equation. It will work for a minute. 25% of your happiness at any given time is due to your circumstances. But it's very temporary, so you shouldn't pay attention to it. What you should do is have good habits so you have systematically better circumstances. And that means that habits are all that matter. Habits will let you manage directly—directly—25% of your happiness. It will give you systematically better circumstances. It will allow you to manage your genetics. Habits are what matter.

I'm going to give you those habits right now. Here are the things you need to do every day, the deposits you need to put into your happiness pension plan. Okay, these are the four accounts. Now, I can give you a thousand strategies and habits, but it wouldn't be helpful because they're mostly trivial. There are only four that are huge in everybody's happiness equation: your faith, your family, your friendships, and your work. Those are the big four.

Now when I say faith, for me, I'm a Christian. It's literally the most important thing in my life. And for many of you, too. I talk to people who are not Christians who can also get tremendous benefit. But let me tell you what you're doing if you go on a mission for your faith: you are spreading happiness. I have the data. I have the science that shows you that you're a Christian apostle and

and witness, but you're also a happiness apostle and witness. That's a great gift. Thank you for doing that. Thank you for making the world a happier place with your mission work. And by the way, you still have mission work for the rest of your life. I'll talk about that more in a second.

The second part is family life. Family is the mystical relationships that are important to all of us that we didn't choose. God knows we wouldn't have chosen them in so many cases. My students come back from Thanksgiving break usually pretty downcast and I'll say, "What happened at Thanksgiving?" They say, "Aunt Marge. Aunt Marge: every year it's the same thing. She won't stop talking about Trump," or something. Love him, hate him. I don't know, whatever. And I'll say, "Yeah, yeah, I get it." Because, you know, these family relationships, they make you nuts. "I completely get it. But let me ask you a question: if you had a personal crisis at 3:00 in the morning and you called Aunt Marge, would she pick up?" "Oh, yeah." "Why?" "I don't know. It's weird." "If Aunt Marge was having a personal crisis and called you at 3 a.m., would you pick up?" "Yes. I don't know why either."

Well, I have the neurophysiology that explains this: there's a neuropeptide in the brain called oxytocin that links us to our kin almost magically. It doesn't matter; the biology is not important. What's really important is the common experience that we have with the people that we love, who are related to us, who are given to us as a gift. We didn't choose them, they were given to us as a gift. You separate from those people at your peril. Schism has only one reason for existing, which is out-and-out abuse. Differences in political opinion? Not abuse. There are very few legitimate reasons to cut off your own happiness by separating yourself from family relationships.

Third is friendship. And by friends I mean the people who really love you and know you. I work with CEOs all day, leaders, constantly. They're the loneliest people I've ever met. Leaders are lonely. They're never alone. But they're lonely, because they have a lot of deal friends but not very many real friends. Real and deal. You know the difference. If you're wondering about the definition, deal friends are incredibly useful. Real friends are useless. Beautifully, lovingly useless. Do you have enough useless people in your life? I don't mean worthless. I have a lot of those. But do you have enough useless people? You have somebody that you could go to and say, you know you're truly useless to me. And I love you for that. That's the ultimate compliment. You need people who just love you, and that takes work. And that's the friendship I'm talking about that will reliably be a happiness habit.

Last, but not least, is your work. And by work, I don't mean the type of job that you have or the money that you make, or the position that you have, or the title. Some of you are going to have really fancy, important jobs, and some of you are going to have jobs that don't look as fancy or as important. It does not matter for your happiness.

You need two things in a job to make you happier, according to the best research and data. Number one, you need to believe that you're earning your success, which means that you're creating value with your life and value in the lives of other people and that you're acknowledged or rewarded for it. Number two, you need to serve other people. You need to believe that you are needed by other people and that you're serving them. Service to others and earn success. That's it. If you have those things, your job will bring you joy. If you're an employer at some point, if people believe they're earning their success and serving others, they won't quit. That's what you need. That's what we all need. That's what we're destined to be, to be those who are in service of our fellow human beings. The best way that we can do it, for most of us, is the way we earn our daily bread. Faith, family, friends, and work. That's what we each need to think about each day.

I want to sum up really quickly. Here are the points I want you to remember:

Number one, you can't be perfectly happy, but you can be happier. That starts with understanding what happiness entails, which is enjoyment. You need an enjoyment maximization, not a pleasure maximization, strategy in your life. It means managing your wants, not just your haves. And it means having answers to your two questions: why am I alive and for what would I be willing to die?

The happiness habits are fourfold, but they all come down to one big principle: love of the divine, love of your family, love of your friends, and love expressed to the whole world through the way that you earn your living. In other words, happiness is love. If you can't remember what to do, just love more.

Next, if you want to make your work into a holy vocation, you need to earn your success, make sure other people can, and most importantly, you need to serve other people.

And here's my last point. I've covered a lot in the last 40 minutes; I realize that. If you want to remember this—I mean, you can go to my website, you can download the materials, you can download a version of the speech if you want—but if you want to remember it, you need to give it. You need to give this lecture. It's not going to be exactly my words. But here's the deal. Go ahead, download my PowerPoints, take my name off, put your name on, and give the lecture. Why? Because this is something that we need to teach, if we're ultimately going to remember it. Many of you have actually had a mission. That's how the mission works. Missions are teaching operations. And the person who is the greatest beneficiary, the apostolate, is the apostle. That's the key point. You want to be happier and bring happiness to others? Explain happiness to others.

Help people understand how they can change their habits and encourage them to become teachers. And then? Then, by the way, you're happier, they're happier, and we have a movement.

Why do I do what I do? Because my mission is to lift people up and to bring them together in bonds of happiness and love using science and ideas. But I can't do this by myself. So on this day, let's actually bring the world what it needs more of, which is love and happiness. And that's going to start by teaching these ideas to others. Join me as a professor of happiness. Thank you.

