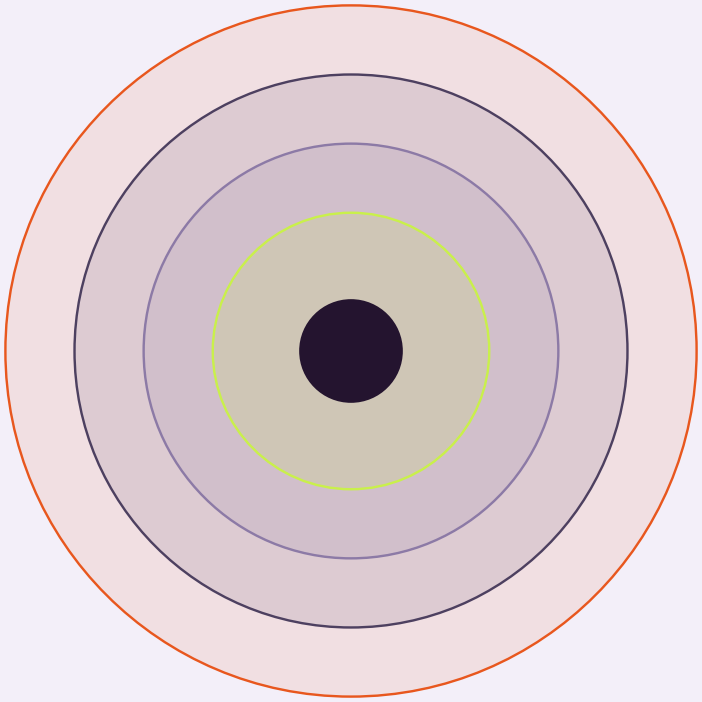


The Meaning of Your Life

A reading of the book by Arthur C. Brooks (2026)

1. ACTION BOOK

CONTENTS

Inside this edition

The book in a minute 3

The takeaways 4

Your action book 6

Before you go 7

PART TWO · THE ACTION BOOK

The setup checklist 9

Practise voluntary boredom once a day 10

Ask why four more times 11

Notice one piece of moral beauty 12

ABOUT THIS EDITION

This is HourLife's reading of The Meaning of Your Life, in our own words. It is not a substitute for the book.

BEFORE YOU START 01

The book in a minute

Arthur C. Brooks's case that meaning is not invented through achievement but uncovered through habit — a diagnosis of the age of emptiness and a practical route back to coherence, purpose and significance.

Below are the 8 ideas HourLife readers vote up most, each in our words with a note on what it asks of you, and then the steps that put them to work.

WHAT READERS KEEP

The takeaways

1 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Meaning has three macronutrients: coherence, purpose and significance. Miss one and the whole diet fails.

Brooks's working definition throughout — coherence is understanding why things happen, purpose is direction, significance is the sense that your life matters to someone.

2 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Modern life is constant stimulation with zero nourishment.

The line that gives the book its subtitle: an age of emptiness is not an age of deprivation but of abundance in the wrong nutrient.

3 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Your world is very good at what and how. It has almost stopped asking why.

Following Iain McGilchrist, Brooks argues technology and achievement culture have over-trained the analytical hemisphere and starved the one that handles unanswerable questions.

4 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Boredom is not the absence of something. It is the room the deep questions need in order to arrive.

Voluntary boredom — sitting with nothing, reaching for nothing — is Brooks's cheapest and least popular prescription.

5 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Work climbs a ladder: necessary evil, duty, craft, calling. Most people stop climbing once the money is fine.

The rung you are on is a subjective fact about how you hold the work, not an objective fact about the job.

6 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Pain multiplied by resistance equals meaning. Remove the pain and you remove the product.

Brooks refuses the comfortable version: suffering is not the obstacle to a meaningful life, it is one of the ingredients.

7 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Beauty comes in three kinds — made, natural and moral — and the third one is the one you can practise.

Art and landscape need access; moral beauty, the goodness of another person, only needs you to be paying attention.

8 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Significance is a question about love, dressed up as a question about achievement.

The book keeps returning people to relationships when they come looking for a better career answer.

PUT IT TO WORK

Your action book

Do the setup steps once, then keep the habits going. The setup changes your week; the habits keep it changed after the first good one.

The download puts this whole reading and a printable action book in one PDF: the setup checklist, then a page of real calendar days for each habit, starting on the day you choose.

SET UP ONCE

- [ ] Score the three macronutrients
- [ ] Name the rung your work is on
- [ ] Block a holy half-hour
- [ ] Start a hardship journal
- [ ] Set the three phone boundaries

KEEP UP DAILY

- ◯ Practise voluntary boredom once a day
- ◯ Ask why four more times
- ◯ Notice one piece of moral beauty

30 days · Nov 11 - Dec 10, 2026

Part two, after the reading, prints each of these as a page to fill in by hand.

THE LAST WORD

Before you go

Pick one step from the action book and do it today. An idea from a book starts to count once it changes what one ordinary day looks like.

PART TWO

The action book

Change the setup once, then keep it up. 5 setup actions to do once, and 3 habits to mark each day for 30 days.

Nov 11 - Dec 10, 2026

Print it, or write on it in any PDF app.

SET UP ONCE

The setup checklist

Each of these is done once. Do one a day, and check it off when it is done.

☐ SETUP 1

Score the three macronutrients

Rate coherence, purpose and significance out of ten for your life as it is this month.

The lowest number is where the work is — most people are not short of purpose, they are short of significance.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

☐ SETUP 2

Name the rung your work is on

Necessary evil, duty, craft, or calling.

Then write the one thing that would move it up a single rung. Brooks's point is that the rung is about how you hold the work, not what the work is.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

☐ SETUP 3

Block a holy half-hour

Put thirty minutes in the calendar, same slot every day, with no phone, no input and no output.

Brooks takes his after exercise. The point is that it is defended, not that it is spiritual.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

☐ SETUP 4

Start a hardship journal

One page per difficulty: what happened, what it cost.

Leave the right-hand column blank — you come back months later and write what it taught. Meaning is retrospective by design.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

☐ SETUP 5

Set the three phone boundaries

No phone in the first hour awake, none in the last hour before sleep, none at a meal with another person.

These three are the book's minimum viable intervention.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

DAILY HABIT 1 OF 3

Practise voluntary boredom once a day

Ten minutes of deliberately doing nothing — queue, lift, walk, waiting room — with nothing in your hand.

Nov 11 - Dec 10, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

November 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11 ○	12 ○	13 ○	14 ○	15 ○
16 ○	17 ○	18 ○	19 ○	20 ○	21 ○	22 ○
23 ○	24 ○	25 ○	26 ○	27 ○	28 ○	29 ○
30 ○						

December 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○	6 ○
7 ○	8 ○	9 ○	10 ○	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP

DAILY HABIT 2 OF 3

Ask why four more times

When you catch yourself chasing something, ask why it matters, then ask again of the answer, four levels down.

Nov 11 - Dec 10, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

November 2026

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EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP

DAILY HABIT 3 OF 3

Notice one piece of moral beauty

Once a day, catch a person being good — patient, generous, honest when it cost them — and register it consciously.

Nov 11 - Dec 10, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

November 2026

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December 2026

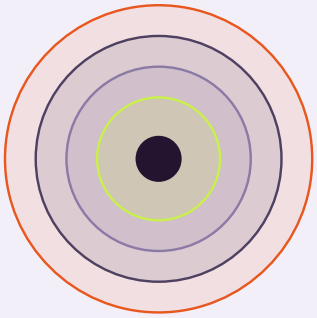
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EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP



Meaning is not something you invent. It is something you uncover, and mostly by putting down the thing in your hand.

ARTHUR C. BROOKS