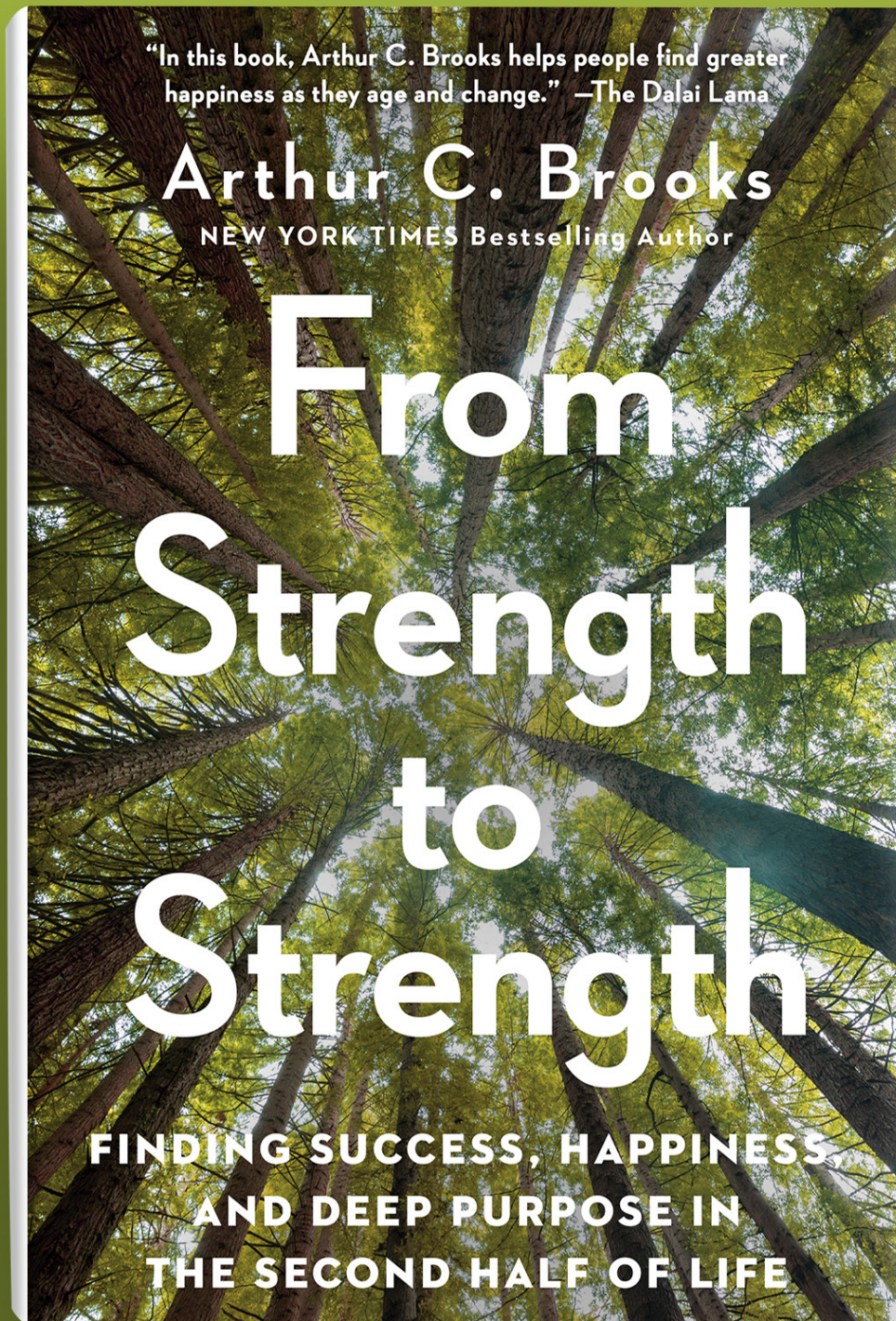


# Reading Group Guide





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1. What brought you to this book?
2. Reflecting on your life so far, what are the relationships, successes, jobs, experiences, and goals that have given you the most satisfaction? What are the ones that have given you the least? Do any of the answers surprise you?
3. As you look toward the second half of your life, what are your wants, desires, and goals? What are you looking forward to? What are you dreading?
4. Brooks writes that noticeable decline in our professional skills happens earlier than most of us expect—usually in our thirties, forties, or fifties. But there are other skills and qualities that actually improve with age. Have you noticed these patterns of decline and improvement in your life? What skills and qualities have you noticed declining as you age? Which have you noticed improving?
5. There are two curves of intelligence: fluid intelligence and crystallized intelligence. What are the benefits to being on each curve of intelligence, and why does Brooks suggest that readers get on their second curve? How can you get on your second curve? Brainstorm two to three ways and share with the group.
6. What is a success addiction? How does it relate to workaholism? What roles do pride and fear play in success addiction?
7. Take the quiz on page 40. What did your answers reveal? Reflect and discuss.
8. What is the “bucket list” problem? Do you have a bucket list, and if so, does crossing things off give you an enduring feeling of satisfaction? Why or why not?
9. Thomas Aquinas named four main worldly idols—money, power, pleasure, and honor—that lead to self-objectification but never satisfy the soul or our craving for happiness. Play Brooks’s “What’s My Idol” party game on page 73. Which of the four is your main idol? Does this idol interfere with your ability to find happiness? Why or why not?
10. Brooks provides three formulas for dissatisfaction:  
    **Satisfaction = Continually getting what you want**  
    **Success = Continually having more than others**  
    **Failure = Having less**  
Discuss what each formula means and the role they have played in your life.



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11. Brooks also provides a formula for satisfaction:  
**Satisfaction = What you have ÷ what you want.**  
Discuss what this means. How can you work to chip away at and manage the denominator of your worldly “wants”?
12. Brooks writes that to truly eradicate the fear of death and decline, we must stare right at it, and that “contemplating death can even make life more meaningful.” How often do you contemplate your decline or death? How do you feel when you do? Does contemplating your own death make your life feel more meaningful? Discuss why or why not.
13. What is loneliness and why is it a threat to long-term happiness? What types of relationships should we cultivate to mitigate loneliness?
14. What does it mean to “cultivate your Aspen grove?” What are the key points to doing so? What are the challenges to doing so?
15. What is the difference between a “real friend” and a “deal friend”? Take stock of your friendships. How many fall into the “real” category vs. the “deal” category? If the first list is short, brainstorm ways to cultivate more “real” friends.
16. What are vanaprastha and sannyasa? How are they achieved? Why is a focus on transcendent things sometimes hard for strivers to attain? Is this true for you?
17. Brooks writes, “To see weakness as purely negative is a mistake.” What does he mean? What is one of your weaknesses that has benefitted your—or someone else’s—life?
18. Complete the two “modern elder” exercises on page 115. Share your responses with the group. Are there one or two actions that feel more challenging than the others? Explore why.
19. Why does Brooks think that our individual decline should be a shared experience?
20. What are the seven words Brooks uses to sum up the lessons of the entire book? Which resonate the strongest with you? Why?