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## Should We Love Our Enemies? | Arthur Brooks

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### The Veritas Forum

What power do everyday citizens have to bridge divides and overcome differences? Is it possible to love those who we see as "enemies" and if so, how? A conversation with Harvard Business School professor Arthur Brooks and Stanford graduate student Isaiah Drummond.

### Transcript

Welcome to the Veritas Forum. This is the Veritas Forum Podcast. A place where ideas and beliefs converge.

What I'm really going to be watching is which one has the resources in their worldview to be tolerant, respectful, and humble toward the people they disagree with. How do we know whether the lives that we're living are meaningful? If energy, light, gravity, and consciousness are in the street, don't be surprised if you're going to get an element of this in God. Today we hear from Harvard Business School professor Arthur Brooks, the author of "Love Your Enemies, How Decent People Can Save America From the Culture of Contempt." In a conversation with Stanford graduate student Isaiah Drummond.

I realize not everyone has been eagerly waiting to notice who you are so I'm just love if you could introduce yourself a little bit for those on the call. And what I really want to hear is you wrote this book "Love Your Enemies" which we're going to dive into. Why did you feel inspired to write this? Why should we even love our enemies? That's a lot thrown your way.

Yeah, I know absolutely. I appreciate it very much. Thanks for moderating this book.

My name is Arthur Brooks. I'm a professor at Harvard University. I teach at the Harvard Kennedy School and the Harvard Business School.

I specialize in love and happiness. I'm a social scientist. I teach a class called "Leadership in Happiness" at the Harvard Business School and I teach on social entrepreneurship.

In other words, big idea on entrepreneurship for people who want to lift others up and bring them together. Before I came to Harvard, I was 10 years president of a think tank in Washington, D.C. called the American Enterprise Institute. And early on in my career I was a classical musician.

So I've done a lot of different things. Studying love and happiness is what I like the most. It's just great.

I have to say, I'm going to call them on the science of happiness for the Atlantic. I have a podcast called "The Armed Happiness." And you know, it's a great life. So you mentioned that I wrote my last book was called "Love Your Enemies." Now, a lot of people who tune into the Veritas Forum, they know the reference.

Matthew chapter 5 verse 44. Not everybody knows what that is. And I think it's a really crazy subversive message, which of course it is.

It's the most subversive, transgressive message in the last 2000 years, as a matter of fact. It unlocks the power of the counterintuitive in the boldest way possible. I was giving, when the book came out in 2019, I was giving a book tour.

It was some place at a university in Virginia. And a student came up afterwards and said, "Wow, I mean, that's a great title. How did you think of that?" And I said, "Well, you know, I think we need a better education system in this country." So I called it that because I had this sense, I was starting to write this book.

I was starting to think of it, this book back in 2014, when, you know, before the 2016 election, when I saw things starting to melt down culturally in the United States, I saw what we social scientists call motive attribution asymmetry, where people are, where mutually can't get along because both sides feel that they're motivated by love, but the other side is motivated by hatred. Now, that sounds an awful lot like what we've seen in "American Politics" today, and that was really starting up. Every conflict, you see that in the, you know, the Balkans and the Rwandan genocide and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

You see that, by the way, when couples were getting a divorce, the one thing that you see is they always feel that they're motivated by love, but the other side is motivated by hatred and contempt and, you know, cold-heartedness. That's an error. Here's the interesting thing, kind of say, yeah.

It's an error because both sides of conflict cannot be simultaneously motivated by love and hatred at the same time. And the only way you can get through to solve that cognitive problem, to untie that Gordian knot, is through a transgressive act, sort of the rhetorical and philosophical scissors, and that is the message that Jesus propagated to love your enemies. And even people who are watching us who are not religious at all,

they know that they need to transgress.

Everybody's hearing yell, scream, burn it down. That's not transgressive. That's like the most conventional thing in history.

That's just so boring. You have to burn something down and scream your head off. So boring.

Love. That's radical, especially when somebody's your enemy. Especially when somebody treats you with contempt.

Then, then you're really changing the rhythm. You're changing society. You're doing something different.

And that's what my book is about. And it's a how-to guide on how to love your enemies. And that's the perfect intro.

If people were not already hooked on this. And speaking of interest to your book, you start off just with this really vivid image of an event with a Black Lives Matter activist meeting a Trump rally in Washington, D.C. in the National Ball. It sounds like something that we would be glued to the screen of watching the train wreck.

And yet what actually occurred is we just saw this radical acceptance. And that you have people on polar opposite sides of the spectrum. You know, say, can speak, say their truths and continue forward and they were ever changed.

And so that's an incredible picture. And yet when I speak with my peers and speak with others, they say, yeah, we can love our enemies, but certain enemies. I mean, there's just so morally wrong.

And so how do you square your assertion that this is, you know, this radical message that we should all strive for? But there's many people today that say like, yes, I agree with you, but there's certain ideas I could just not agree to disagree about. Yeah. Yeah.

And then the question is, what are you going to do about those ideas and what's your goal? So, you know, there's always disagreement. And there's there's there's there's radical disagreement. There's sometimes violence agreement.

Thank God that we live in a country where still we're not adjudicating our politics with a knock in the night and the jack and the thug. And thank God. I mean, this is a great achievement of the United States that it rarely devolves into that.

But the question is going to be if you think that somebody is contemptible in their views and beyond the pale, what do you want? So I'll ask people this a lot. I'll get on college campuses. People will say, yeah, but some people deserve contempt.

So, okay. So what do you want from them? Do you want to exile them from the United States? Like, no. Do you want to put them in jail for their views? No.

Do you want to sneak into their house and do them violence while they sleep and hurt their kids? Of course not. I'm not a terrible person. What do you want? And the answer is, I want them to think and act different.

Okay. So how is your hate working for that? How effective is it? Let's just talk practically speaking. Nobody in the history of humanity has ever been insulted into agreement.

It has never happened. That's number one. It's incredibly impractical.

Dr. King said this and this is a wonderful sermon that he gave. November 17, 1957, the Dexter Street Baptist Church month of Alabama burned and is not my memories. I wasn't born yet, but I've read it and I've listened to it.

And he said, Jesus didn't say like your enemies because like is a sentimental something. He said, love your enemies because only when you love your enemies, can you redeem your enemies? That's the point. If you want people to think differently, love is the only way.

That's number one. Practical, practical, practical, practical. Jesus was very practical in his teaching.

But then there's the moral side to it too. And everybody who's watching, we're not in person, so I can't ask for a show of hands. So I want to show a heart right now because I can actually see the icons coming up.

How many of you love somebody with whom you disagree politically? 100% and you don't love somebody with whom you disagree politically, you need more friends. You need a more diverse family. You need a more diverse community because the truth of the matter is virtually everybody does.

And this is the life of life. That's why diversity is such a very beautiful thing, even when it's a kind of diversity that creates a lot of conflict. So now think about it.

How good do you feel about somebody on your political side saying that your sister is stupid and evil? That your mother or your mother-in-law is stupid and evil. That's not right. My father, my beloved father of blessed memory, he and I disagreed completely on politics, but he was probably right.

And he taught me this. He was a committed Christian from the moment of his birth until the moment of his death. And he said one time, he said, don't forget that the definition of moral courage.

What is it, Dad? What's the definition of moral courage? And he said, the definition of

moral courage is not standing up to the people with whom you agree, whom you disagree. That's a good thing to do, right? Do you disagree with somebody, then speak your mind. But that's not moral courage.

Moral courage is standing up to the people with whom you agree on behalf of those who keep you disagree. Wow. Now think about that's really hard to do.

That's like practically, I sit on a university campus and when you're sitting in a class and everybody thinks the same way, and some student says, that guy lies more than that, and then filling your presidential candidate and everybody laughs and the teacher says right on. And then somebody in the class who's kind of a comfortable, your job, even if you agree with that comment, is to say, whoa, whoa, whoa, maybe we don't all agree in here, right? Why? Because basically it gets back to this idea that we love somebody with whom we disagree and our strength actually comes from the shared loves that we have as such that we can persuade each other and be more persuadable. That's the secret to our success.

Wow. And I mean, just hearing this moral courage. We say many things are easier said than done.

That's even hard to say to speak about that. And so you mentioned in your book, I mean, really on this topic of love and trying to define what love is, and you quote this educator, Stephen Covey, and I have the quote here that says, "If our feelings control our actions, it's because we have abdicated our responsibility and empowerment to do so." Reactive people make love a feeling. Proactive people make love a verb.

Love is something you do. The sacrifices you make, the giving of self, love is of value that is actualized through loving actions. What do you mean here when you're quoting between love as a verb, love as a feeling, love of an action? What does this mean? Because they seem to have this powerful descriptive language, but behind that language is actually substance to it.

Yeah, for sure. And this is the key thing to remember about love per se. And this is the essence of what Dr. King was getting at when I was quoting before.

Like is a feeling. Love is a commitment. So as opposed to quoting a self improvement off it, like Stephen Covey, let me quote St. Thomas Aquinas.

Aquinas said that to love is to will the good of the other as other. Think about that for a second. This is super hardcore, right? It didn't say that love is a feeling.

It's not like some hormonal response. I mean, your feelings are determined to a large extent about what you're digesting. Love is to will, right? I mean, it's like, the love is to will the good of the other.

And so right now I'm talking Isaiah and I want Isaiah's good. In this conversation, I want your good. That's the essence of brotherly love, is to will the good of another person.

So the question is, are you strong enough? Do you have the commitment? Do you have the personal self discipline? Do you have the ability for self denial sufficient so that you can wield the good of the other? And if you do, then you're going to do things even when you don't feel them. And that's what grownups do. We do it all that.

It's a crazy thing. One of the best things about becoming a father was that I wound up really, really learning how to do all kinds of things I didn't want to do, like get up in the middle of the night. Or even more, it's to be kind of a disciplinary one.

I don't want to be. I want to be a nice guy all the time. It's like, I don't know, sure, you can have like graham crackers and peanut butter for dinner.

I don't care. Whatever you want. Whatever you want, because that's the path of least resistance.

Right? The truth of the matter is that because of love, it's clear of all this crazy stuff in our lives. You know, we have this society that's excessively empathetic and insufficiently compassionate. You know, we feel the pain and we're not willing to do hard things.

You are not willing for our kids, in our society, for each other. We're not willing to tell each other the truth because we don't wheel the good of the other. We're looking for feelings.

That's where we get an excessively empathetic, insufficiently compassionate society and as people. And we become worse leaders. And it's just a huge problem.

When we think of when it stems from the concept of love as a feeling, as opposed to loving of commitment. And so on this idea, you know, willing, the good of others. Yes, like, I feel like a lot of people, I see all the hearts here.

People are loving this. And then we end this call and you interact, you turn on the TV and you're like, "Ah, I can't believe, you know, insert political person here saying that. I'm going to go into my own little bubble here." And we can even take this outside of politics.

I'm thinking of those who are Christians who you want, you know, others to believe in what you believe because you want what is good for them. You're willing to good. And yet we live in a very secular society where there's many different truths that are out there, truth claims.

And so you also said in your book that we need to be grounded. If I believe I am right, I have the duty to stick to my views, but duty is also to be kind. Like you were just talking about it, to be compassionate.

And so how do we stick, let's say, as Christians, to our religious convictions about truth while also being compassionate about those who may be vehemently disagree? And one reason I ask this is because, well, it's not a question. This could be applied in a political sense. But I think for many believers, we're just feeling this tug of war everywhere we go.

You know, it's a great question. And what it speaks to is this idea that if somebody disagrees with you, then therefore you have nothing in common and you cannot or should not somehow treat them with respect and love. But that's, of course, exactly wrong.

Let me back up a little bit. I'm married now. I've been married for 30 years, right? The secret to my happy marriage is exactly not that we agree.

There's a ton of stuff that we agree on. We disagree fundamentally on what temperature should be on the thermostat. I mean, that's a little kind of, I mean, sometimes it's kind of big.

But we disagree in all kinds of stuff and we coexist. I mean, the essence of a good society is one in which we can go hammer and tongs about issues. But at the basis of our society is a bunch of shared loves.

See, this is the key thing, you know, and it's, you know, one of the reasons that the countries that are pretty patriotic, one of the reasons that they tend to be pretty strong is not because they agree on public policy, but because they have a shared love for their country. The main reason that my wife and I have such a good marriage is that we have a shared romantic and companion and love for each other in an abiding love for our children. And most importantly, a refracted love for our Savior.

That's the biggie. I mean, that's the biggie that holds our marriage together. That's the biggie that holds a lot of my friendships together, or shared love for Jesus Christ.

You know, and so if you have your shared loves, it does not matter if you disagree on different ways to express those loves. It does not matter, even if you perpetually disagree on these things. But if you stop thinking about your shared loves, then you're in trouble.

If you start listening to politicians who say that, you know what really matters, you know what really matters in this country is how we deliver health care. And if we can't decide on how we deliver health care, we might as well become a bunch of different countries. That's insanity.

Look, how we deliver health care is this is something that we should be going back and forth on, right? And if I don't get everything that I want, I still live in the country I love. And that's the beautiful thing. That's what we have to remember.

Look, there's a column of mission that goes through every relationship. And there's a spiral staircase of ideas and values and policies that goes around that mission. Don't mistake the spiral for the column.

The column is what holds the whole thing up. And so just on that, and this may sound, you know, rudimentary question, you know, going back to preschool, kindergarten here. When we're talking here, we talk about the shared love.

And for me, the thing that's sticking out is the word love, but also the word shared. So we can work, let's say on ourselves, we have this love for neighbor and we're trying and we fail, but we keep trying forward. How do we even connect in the first place? Like, how do we get to that shared love so that we can respectfully disagree? You know, it's interesting.

I was thinking about that. I was trying to figure out how to do that. This is a social scientist.

One of the things that I try to do before I do actual research is I go to the field. And the laboratory for me is the humans. Right? And so I was thinking about if I get people together who are just really in deep disagreement politically, Democrats, Republicans, conservatives, conservatives in the world, but not in the middle, like people in kind of on the polls, who just they don't think they have anything in common and they can't agree on anything.

How do we, how can I start a conversation that will tend toward unity as opposed to tending toward disunity? Now, the way that you tend toward disunity is by saying, should Trump be reelected, for example, right? And then it's like, "Oh, no, yes, everyone's fighting." So then I thought, okay, so I was raised in Seattle and I love my little brother. He still lives in Seattle. And we disagree politically.

We have different political views. He has the political views more or less of my family. And I don't.

I'm the outlier. I'm the oddball in my family. But I thought to myself, why do I love it? Why do we get along so great? And the answer is, we spend all of our time talking about the things that we both love.

You know, the memories of our parents who died pretty young, our children, we're super interested in each of those kids. We're both committed to our Christian faith. That's what we talk.

And by the way, he's also, you know, he's done a lot of work. He's really, really helped me in my work because he's interested in the same things that I am. That's the stuff that we talk about.



I realize that we never get to politics, not because we're avoiding it, but because there's so much stuff that's more important, which is our shared love. So I go into the lab to bring people together and they realize that the first topic of conversation shouldn't be, should Trump be elected. The first topic of conversation should be, what do we both love? And I ask people to tell each other about their kids.

That turns out to be the right because you can't hate somebody who just told you about how much their teenage kids are driving them crazy. I mean, these shared loves and shared anxieties and shared, I mean, these passions that we have that we can relate to. When you talk about the important stuff first, everything else falls into place with respect to its proper place in line.

And that's we need to be ordering our priorities. We need to be using our time appropriately, talking and thinking about the things. So you quoted Stephen Covey a minute ago who wrote the Seven Habits of Highly Effective People.

So everybody watching us, if you haven't read the Seven Habits of Highly Effective People, two books you need to read from self-improvement, that and how to win Friends and Influence People by the other party. Both great books. Beautiful books.

They're fantastic books. Before you read anything, I've written, read those. That's for sure.

So, and then rebind. Anyway, so this is the interesting thing that Stephen Covey says. He says that we get all stuck in the urgent and never get to the important things.

And so you see people who are running around all the time and really anxious and freaking out and they never actually get anything. Deep, deep, done. And that's because they're actually not thinking about the important things.

They're never clearing away the brush for the important things. They're just occupied with the urgent. That's what we're doing in our political discourse.

That's what we're doing in our culture. All of these urgent things like the election are obscuring the important things like the shared loves that we have for these American values that we still do hold in common. And then, you know, the people that we want to serve and the values and the dreams that we can and should have as a country.

That stuff is more important. I realize that the politics is urgent, but it's not important in the same way. And on this, and I realize we're basically at time and I could talk forever about, you know, every quote in your book.

But when I think to what's happening next month, I mean, many people's minds go to the election, but mine also goes to, you know, Thanksgiving and tell them when you want to be grateful and think about those are important in your life. And I think these

two things are in the minds of many people, whether you're able to see family or friends in person or virtually or what have you. And so I guess one of the questions I want to leave with you and try to get an answer for is, what is one thing that you would want to encourage all of us on this call to do when it comes to remembering that you're not going to be able to see family or friends or a person or a person or a person or what have you? And so I think that you would want to encourage all of us on this call to do when it comes to remembering the importance of the urgent as we think about maybe family members that some people don't want to talk to because the political differences are unfriending people on social media.

What's one tangible thing we can do. So I would like everybody to go to their Thanksgiving dinner and think of it as the mission field. So when you're a missionary.

And a lot of people who know missionaries on this call, I've had missionaries on both sides of my family. You don't kick down the door and scare people. That's not what you do.

Yeah, you don't say, you know, you're awful. You're the worst. Because that's, that's getting covered.

Nobody wants to hear that. You are going to run toward darkness with light and you're going to try to be winsome and you're going to listen to the circumstances of people's lives. And you're going to tell them if you're a missionary about God's love for them.

That's how you win people over. Okay. So, so, so if you're not, that's a good thing to do on Thanksgiving too, by the way, is reminding people that God loves them.

Yeah. But now do it in a more personal way. Go there with the intention of winning people's hearts by having them know that you love them.

And you know what that means? That means listening. That means being caring. That means giving.

That means being persuadable. And that means saying the three words. I love you.

And this Thanksgiving, here's my challenge to everybody. Here's that how to get into the mission field. And Thanksgiving, there's going to be somebody where that's hard to say.

And maybe scary. And if it, if it isn't scary, then it's not exactly the right person to be your challenge. Make it an entrepreneurial challenge.

And try to leave having somebody say, you know, my niece, I disagree with her politically. My aunt, my aunt, Marge, she sure is a lefty. Uncle Bill, what a right winger.

But I'll be darned. Uncle Bill loves me. He told me.

That's my challenge. If you like this and you want to hear more, like, share, review, and subscribe to this podcast. And from all of us here at the Veritas Forum, thank you.

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