

EXCERPT

IVP Books

The Common Rule *Habits of Purpose for an Age of Distraction*

February 19, 2019 | \$18, 204 pages, paperback | 978-0-8308-4560-6

The modern world has us addicted to our technology, shackled by our screens, and exhausted by our routines. What can we do about it? Justin Earley offers four daily and four weekly habits, designed to help us create new routines and transform frazzled days into lives of love for God and neighbor. As you embark on these life-giving practices, you will find freedom and rest for your soul.

Eight Habits of Purpose for an Age of Distraction

The Common Rule is made up of eight habits, four daily and four weekly.

The daily habits are

- kneeling prayer at morning, midday, and bedtime,
- one meal with others,
- one hour with phone off, and
- Scripture before phone.

The weekly habits are

- one hour of conversation with a friend,
- curate media to four hours,
- fast from something for twenty-four hours, and
- sabbath.

Each habit also corresponds to two different spectrums. The first spectrum is the love of God and the love of neighbor, with four habits focused on each. The second spectrum contrasts embrace and resistance, with four habits designed for each.

Love of God. Another way to look at the habits is as they pertain to love of God. You were made to love and be loved by God. Only in the light of his love will you finally see who you really are, feel how you are supposed to feel, and discover what you should do with your days. Thus four of the habits of the Common Rule are pointed toward opening our eyes to who God is, accepting the love he freely offers, and returning the gaze that has always been fixed on us:

- sabbath,
- fasting,
- prayer, and
- Scripture before phone.

Love of neighbor. When we think of better habits, we often think about our own self-improvement. Nothing could be further from the purpose of the Common Rule. These habits are meant to be practiced with others and for their sake:

- meals,
- conversation,
- phone off, and
- curate media.

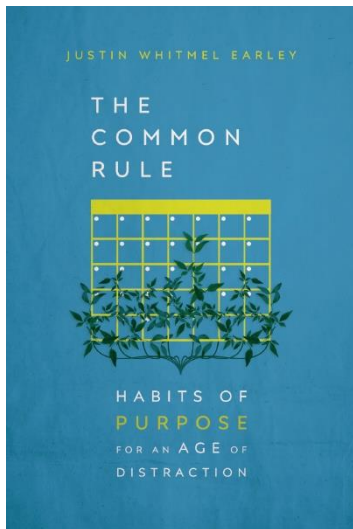


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"Habitually choosing what is best over and above what is loud and urgent has never been more difficult than in a culture of perpetual distraction. 'But where do I begin?' people ask. In this book, Justin Earley offers the answer. Follow his lead, and you will find much of your life handed back to you."

John Stonestreet, president of The Chuck Colson Center for Christian Worldview

The word *neighbor* here is used in the New Testament sense of the word. A neighbor is anyone and everyone who needs our love: family, friends, strangers, and enemies. These four habits mean spending meaningful time with other people. They encourage us to interrupt our busy schedules for the sake of rhythms of community. They encourage us to put down our devices and become more present with others. A friend asked me whether the Common Rule helped us care for ourselves, and my answer was, "yes, because we're made to be happy when we're focusing on others." These habits are designed to help us spend our days for the sake of others, rather than just ourselves.

Embrace. Embrace is a reminder that there is much good in the world God made. God's presence—not his absence—is the primary fact of the world. That we need each other—not that we harm each other—is the primary truth of being human. In the habits of embrace, we try to train our bodies and our hearts to love God as he actually is and to turn to our neighbor as we were made to do. The habits of embrace are

- sabbath,
- prayer,
- meals, and
- conversation.

Resistance. When we practice resistance, we acknowledge that evil and suffering are very real, though they aren't how the world was made to be. Our world is full of a thousand invisible habits of fear, anger, anxiety, and envy that we unconsciously and consciously adopt. Should we do nothing, we *will* be taught to love the very things that tear us apart. So we must take up the fight, open our eyes to the way media form us in fear and hate, the way screens form us in absence, and see the way excess and laziness train us to love ourselves above all else.

But remember that resistance has a purpose: *love*. The habits of resistance aren't supposed to shield you from the world but to turn you toward it. They aren't so you can feel good about what you've done for you. They exist so you can feel peace about what God has done for you. The habits of resistance are

- fasting,
- Scripture before phone,
- phone off, and
- curate media.

—Taken from "Part One: How to Practice the Common Rule."



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Justin Whitmel Earley (JD, Georgetown University) is the creator of *The Common Rule*, a program of habits designed to form us in the love of God and neighbor. He is also a mergers and acquisitions lawyer in Richmond, Virginia. He previously spent several years in China as the founder and general editor of *The Urbanity Project* and as the director of *Thought and Culture Shapers*, a nonprofit organization dedicated to serving the community through arts. He and his wife, Lauren, have four sons and live in Richmond, Virginia.

Follow *The Common Rule* on Twitter: @thecommonrule.

“My Habits Wrecked Me”

What experience inspired you to write *The Common Rule*?

Justin Whitmel Earley: This book was born out of my own emotional collapse early in my law career. The house of my life was decorated with Christian content, but the architecture was just like everyone else’s. By not thinking about habits, I had adopted all the usual habits of contemporary Americans, especially as it applied to top law students and busy young lawyers. I had no idea how much habits function like little liturgies of our daily life, forming us in the worship of unknown idols, until my habits wrecked me. As my wife and close friends helped me put my life back together, they got me on a program of daily and weekly habits to help keep me within reasonable boundaries. They were little things like hours to turn my phone off and promises to take a day off once a week. But as I began to indwell these rhythms I not only saw how enormous the impact of little habits are, my eyes were also opened to the other one thousand habits we never notice. These new habits changed my life so much that my friends demanded I share them. I put together *The Common Rule* as a way for our friends to practice formational habits together. I had no idea how many people would be interested, but here we are.

How impactful are the simple habits of our daily lives?

Justin: Habits form us more than we form them—so choose carefully. We can say all we want about what we believe and who we want to become, but we will all be formed by our habits as much if not more than our hopes. *The Common Rule* is distinctive in its communal practicality. It is not a book meant to be read alone. It is a companion to practicing new habits in a communal context, with a small group, friend group, congregation, small office, etc.

What do you want to convey to readers about their day-to-day practices?

Justin: I want readers to realize that their mundane lives are not neutral. They are full of worship and meaning. I want the veil to be pulled back so that people see what’s at stake in the ways they set up their days and weeks. Then, I want them to start trying to set up communal habits that intentionally guide them toward the love of God and neighbor. Trying a week or a month of *The Common Rule* is a way to do that.



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