

BIBLE STUDY GUIDE + STREAMING VIDEO

FIVE SESSIONS

JUSTIN WHITMEL EARLEY



HABITS OF THE HOUSEHOLD

SIMPLE PRACTICES TO HELP YOU
AND YOUR FAMILY DRAW CLOSER TO GOD

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Habits of the Household Bible Study Guide

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A NOTE FROM JUSTIN

Habits are fascinating things. They are the everyday actions we do again and again, whether semiconsciously or unconsciously. They allow us to do complicated tasks on autopilot, like flipping pancakes or changing diapers while also chatting with a spouse about an issue or mulling over a work problem. We can do this because of the phenomenon of habit.

Whether we realize it or not, our habits play a significant part in our spiritual formation and the spiritual formation of our families. Our households are not simply products of what we teach and say. They are much more the products of what we practice and do. For example, most of us parents want to be patient, attentive, gentle, and loving toward our kids. But until our hopes make their way from our heads to our habits, nothing will change. The idea of the parents we want to be will remain stuck in our minds—and our kids will suffer as a result.

But it doesn't have to be that way. It is possible to practice habits of the household that lead our hearts, and our children's hearts, in new directions. I've seen this happen in my own parenting life. For instance, it used to be that when my kids spilled something, I immediately reprimanded them, which led to an impatient mood of constantly snapping at them. I had to cultivate a new habit of saying (often through gritted teeth), "That's okay. Why don't you help me clean it up?" This led to me *feeling* more patient because I *practiced* talking patiently.

Now, let me be careful and clear in saying this wasn't an immediate or easy process. Likewise, it won't necessarily be easy or immediate for you to implement these habits in your household. Nothing important ever is easy. But I will say that changing these habits is *possible*.

What's more, you are not alone in the journey. The Christian posture toward habits of the household is not about carrying your family on your back and hiking up the steep mountain of life. It is much more childlike than that. It is simply about taking hold of the outstretched hand of your heavenly Father and following him . . . one baby step at a time.

HABITS OF THE HOUSEHOLD

So don't worry. Rethinking the habits of your household isn't a heavy burden. What is heavy and burdensome is continuing to do *nothing*. Taking the hand of God and being willing to follow him wherever he leads—that's light. It's the posture of a child. Someone who is stronger than you and who loves you is in charge. And that's good news for parents and children.

—Justin Whitmel Earley

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

The big reality that sparked this study into life is that people become their habits. This is true for people generally, and it is true for you and me specifically. Scary, right? Well, here is something even more frightening: not only do you become your habits, but your children also become you. Your habits have a huge impact on your kids.

This is why we are going to spend the next several weeks exploring the *habits of the household*—those daily routines we do that have such a big impact on our families. We are going to see how intentionally harnessing the most routine moments in our lives can pay huge dividends not only in our own spiritual formation but in the lives of those we love most.

Now, before you begin, keep in mind that there are a few ways you can go through this material. You can experience this study with others in a group (such as a Bible study, Sunday school class, or any other small-group gathering), or you may choose to go through the content on your own. Either way, know that the videos for each session are available for you to view at any time via streaming by following the instructions provided with this study guide.

GROUP STUDY

Each of the sessions in this study are divided into two parts: (1) a group study section, and (2) a personal study section. The group study section provides a basic framework on how to open your time together, get the most out of the video content, and discuss the key ideas that were presented in the teaching. Each session includes the following:

- **Welcome:** A short opening note about the topic of the session for you to read on your own before you meet as a group.
- **Connect:** A few icebreaker questions to get you and your group members thinking about the topic and interacting with each other.
- **Watch:** An outline of the key points covered in each video teaching along with space for you to take notes as you watch each session.
- **Discuss:** Questions to help you and your group reflect on the teaching material presented and apply it to your lives.
- **Respond:** A short personal exercise to help reinforce the key ideas.
- **Pray:** A place to record requests that you will pray about during the week.

If you are doing this study in a group, make sure you have your own copy of the study guide so you can write down your thoughts, responses, and reflections—and so you have access to the videos via streaming. You will also want to have a copy of *Habits of the Household*, as reading it alongside the curriculum will provide you with deeper insights. (See the notes at the beginning of each group session and personal study section on which chapters of the book you should read before the next group session.)

Finally, keep these points in mind:

- **Facilitation:** If you are doing this study in a group, you will want to appoint someone to serve as a facilitator. This person will take the lead on starting the video and keeping track of time during discussions and activities. If you have been chosen for this role, there are some resources in the back of this guide that can help you lead your group through the study.
- **Faithfulness:** Your group is a place where tremendous growth can happen as you reflect on the Bible, ask questions, and learn what God is doing in other people's lives. For this reason, be fully committed and attend each session so you can build trust and rapport with the other members.
- **Friendship:** The goal of any small group is to serve as a place where people can share, learn about God, and build friendships. So seek to make your group a safe place by being honest about your thoughts and feelings, but also by listening carefully to everyone else in the group. Keep anything personal that your group members share in confidence so that you can create an authentic community where people can heal, be challenged, and grow spiritually.

If you are going through this study on your own, read the opening Welcome section and reflect on the questions in the Connect section. Watch the video and use the outline provided to take notes. Finally, personalize the questions and exercises in the Discuss and Respond sections. Close by recording any requests you want to pray about during the week.

PERSONAL STUDY

The personal study is for you to go work through on your own during the week. Each exercise is designed to help you explore the key ideas you uncovered during your group time and delve into passages of Scripture that will help you apply those principles to your life. Go at your own pace, doing a little each day—or tackle the material all at once. Remember to spend a few moments in silence to listen to whatever God might be saying to you.

Note that if you are doing this study as part of a group, and you are unable to finish (or even start) these personal studies for the week, you should still attend the group time. Be assured that you are still wanted and welcome even if you don't have your "homework" done. The group studies and personal studies are intended to help you hear what God wants you to hear and how to apply what he is saying to your life. So . . . as you go through this study, be listening for him to speak to you about the habits he wants you to have in your household.

WEEKEND RETREAT

If you are the group leader, you might want to consider planning a *Habits of the Household* weekend retreat for couples in your group or in your church. Refer to the Leader's Guide at the back of this study guide for options and tips on how to make this happen. The weekend retreat will require some planning, but you will find that the attendees will benefit greatly from it.

SCHEDULE

WEEK 1

BEFORE GROUP MEETING	Read chapters 1 and 10 in <i>Habits of the Household</i> Read the Welcome section (page 13)
GROUP MEETING	Discuss the Connect questions Watch the video teaching for session 1 Discuss the questions that follow as a group Do the closing exercise and pray (pages 13–21)
STUDY 1	Complete the personal study (pages 25–27)
STUDY 2	Complete the personal study (pages 28–30)
STUDY 3	Complete the personal study (pages 31–33)
CONNECT AND DISCUSS	Connect with someone in your group (page 34)
CATCH UP AND READ AHEAD (BEFORE WEEK 2 GROUP MEETING)	Read chapters 2 and 5 in <i>Habits of the Household</i> Complete any unfinished personal studies (page 35)

SESSION ONE

WAKING UP TO HABITS OF THE HOUSEHOLD



I lie down and sleep; I wake again, because the LORD sustains me. I will not fear though tens of thousands assail me on every side.

PSALM 3:5–6

The main **measure** of your devotion to
God is not your **devotional life**.
It is simply your **life**.

JOHN ORTBERG¹

We are what we repeatedly do.
Excellence, then, is not
an **act**, but a **habit**.

WILL DURANT²

WELCOME [read on your own]

Did you know your brain is designed for habits? Without getting too technical, habits are formed in the deepest part of our brains, called the basal ganglia. This is the part of our brains that allow us to operate on autopilot—doing routine tasks like tying our shoes or washing the dishes without us even really thinking about what we are doing.

Habits are necessary for life as we know it. They free up our minds to focus on the more important stuff, like relationships and challenges at work, even as we perform routines such as driving a car, folding laundry, or walking without falling down. Habits are so powerful that we drift into them without conscious thought.

The problem is that not all habits are good. Some are even negative and harmful. This can include everything from biting our fingernails, to eating sweets, to lashing out in anger. We can carry out these harmful habits without even realizing we are doing so. And they are difficult to change, because we develop habits by practicing them over and over (often unconsciously), so we can't just *think* our way out of a habit. We can only remove bad habits—or replace them with good ones—by practicing routines that we want to implement again and again.

This is the goal of this study: to help you learn how to intentionally harness the power of habits in ways that produce good for you and for those you love. In this opening session, we are going to start by looking at two routines that are biologically essential and shape everything else that we experience in a given day. Those routines are around *waking* and *sleeping*.

CONNECT [10 minutes]

If you or any of your group members don't know each other, take a few minutes to introduce yourselves. Then discuss one or both of the following questions:

- Why did you decide to join this study? What do you hope to learn?
- or—
- What is an example of a habit or routine that has impacted your life?

WATCH [20 minutes]

Now watch the video for this session, which you can access by playing the DVD or through streaming (see the instructions provided with this guide). Below is an outline of the key points covered during the teaching. Record any key concepts that stand out to you.

Outline

- I. At times in our lives, we gain an epiphany of what it is like to live with *us*.
 - A. Realizing what the “normal” is for ourselves and our family can be discouraging.
 - B. But there are liturgies we can implement to change our normal.
 - C. A new normal can be achieved through the power of a good parenting habit.
- II. God will do some of his most extraordinary spiritual work in the ordinary hallways of family life.
 - A. We live in a household filled with habits. The question is: *what habits do we want to have?*
 - B. This question is critical because we become our habits—and then our children become us.
 - C. When we are honest about our messy normal, it opens us up to receiving God’s grace.
- III. Habit #1: A kneeling prayer right beside our bed as soon as we wake up.
 - A. It’s easy to start the day thinking about everything we need to do—but it’s not helpful.
 - B. A morning prayer starts the day by refocusing on what God has already done.
 - C. The point is to start the day with what God has done so we can follow his lead.
- IV. Habit #2: Go to Scripture before phone (or any other distraction).
 - A. This simply means to eliminate the phone from our morning routines.
 - B. If we start the day with news and notifications, we will feel anxious about the world.
 - C. It is so much better to start the day with wisdom from God’s Word.
- V. Habit #3: Morning prayer with our children.
 - A. A morning prayer intentionally invites our children into discipleship.
 - B. These prayers should be simple and practical rather than extravagant and fancy.

- C.** Little moments in the routine can bring enormous changes in the family's life.

Notes



Scripture Before Phone

Commit to implementing a set of practices in your home that make a habit of ignoring your phone in the morning and going to the Bible instead. Tips to start:

- Set your phone to Do Not Disturb so you don't see notifications upon waking. Also set an alarm or change the wallpaper on your phone to remind you.
- Make it a routine to go to the same couch or chair each morning. Place your Bible and a journal nearby so that they are readily accessible.
- Follow a reading plan or a devotional, ideally with your spouse or others.
- Be comfortable with brief readings and prayers as the norm, but let the habit grow to longer times as permitted on weekends or slower days.
- Lean toward a print Bible, but if you use a Scripture app, use voice activation to open it so you don't get distracted with other things on your phone.
- When just beginning, tell a friend or spouse that you are trying to develop this habit so they can help keep you accountable. Ideally, try thirty days together.
- Don't get mad when you mess up. Habits are norms, not rules.



Ideas for Morning Kneeling Prayers

Briefly, and beside the bed:

- Lord, thank you for the gift of another day. Help me walk with your love into whatever work you have called me to today. Amen.
- Lord, thank you for the gift of a day with the ones you have given me to love. Be among us as we work at play and work at love. Amen.
- Lord, please help. Remind me of your power in my weakness as I try to love others, despite my exhaustion. Amen.

DISCUSS [40 minutes]

Discuss what you just watched by answering the following questions.

1. An *epiphany* can be defined as “an intuitive grasp of reality through something (such as an event) usually simple and striking.”³ When have you experienced an epiphany in your life about something that was not working? What brought about that epiphany?

2. We all have an idea of what is considered “normal” in our households—those routines, actions, and attitudes that are typically experienced in our homes. What are some words that describe what “normal” looks like in your household right now?

3. The wonderful reality for each of us is that God will do some of his most profound and extraordinary spiritual work within the ordinary rhythms and routines of ordinary homes. When has that been true in your life—both as a child and now as an adult?

4. In the video, we explored three potential new habits for waking up: (1) a kneeling prayer by the bed, (2) always putting Scripture before phone, and (3) a morning prayer with our children. Which of those three strikes you as most potentially helpful in your household?
5. Bedtime is a moment for both parent and child to acknowledge that at the end of the day, God loves us. The following page contains several suggestions for simple bedtime liturgies and blessings. Which of these are most interesting or different to you? Right now, what are some of the bigger challenges or obstacles that make bedtime frustrating in your household?

A Tickle Blessing

Suddenly, and with lots of squirming:

Parent: Dear Lord, may this child find much joy and laughter, all of his/her days.

Child: Uncontrollable laughter, until they can barely breathe.

Parent: Amen.

A Bouncy Blessing

While bouncing around the child, and trying to get as much giggling and flopping as possible:

Parent: Lord, may this child bounce from blessing to blessing, all of his/her days.

Child: Bouncing and laughing

Parent: Amen.

A Blessing for the Body

As prayer progresses, move hands to touch each part of the body:

Jesus, bless their feet, may they bring good news.

Bless their legs, may they carry on in times of suffering.

Bless their backs, may they be strong enough to bear the burdens of others.

Bless their arms to hold the lonely, **and their hands** to do good work.

Bless their necks, may they turn their heads toward the poor.

Bless their ears to discern truth, **their eyes** to see beauty, and **their mouths** to speak encouragement.

Bless their minds, may they grow wise.

And finally, **bless their hearts,** may they grow to love you—and all that you have made—in the right order. Amen.

RESPOND [10 minutes]

For centuries, Jewish families have followed their own “habits of the household” by reciting the *Shema* out loud each day. This prayer, recorded in Deuteronomy 6:4–9, was originally offered by Moses after he restated the Ten Commandments to the Israelites while they gathered on the outskirts of the Promised Land. Jesus quoted a portion of this same passage when one of the scribes of his day asked him to identify the most important commandment in Scripture (see Mark 12:29–30). Here is the passage from the book of Deuteronomy:

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

Deuteronomy 6:4–9

Where do you see connections between these verses and the themes described in the video?

What are some habits or routines that come to mind when you think about impressing God’s Word on your heart as you sit at home, walk along the road, lie down, and get up?

SESSION ONE

PERSONAL STUDY

We all live in homes filled with habits. In fact, the question is not whether we have habits but what kinds of habits we have. This is why it is important for us to take a look at the habits we have established in our homes to see if they are leading us and our families toward spiritual maturity or away from it. This is the goal of these personal studies—to provide you with a place to make this assessment. As you work through the exercises, be sure to write down your responses to the questions, as you will be given a few minutes to share your insights at the start of the next session if you are doing this study with others. If you are reading *Habits of the Household* alongside this study, first review the Introduction and chapters 1 and 10 of the book.

STUDY ONE

THE FOUNDATION

As mentioned in the group time, we are going to be spending a lot of time and attention in this study focusing on habits, routines, liturgies, and other “regular” elements in our lives and in our homes. These explorations will be highly practical. Yet it is also important to start this study by exploring the root and foundation that undergirds all of those “regular” activities.

This root and foundation is *love*. First, it is the love that we experience from our heavenly Father. Remember, before we become parents, we are first children—specifically, children of God. His love for us undergirds everything we do within our households.

Second, it is the love between us as people, including love for our spouses and love for our kids. And, yes, given the realities of our culture, that also includes the love and grace we show one another as ex-spouses, step-parents, step-children, in-laws, and the like. Everything that touches our homes must be rooted in love.

So, as we prepare to explore all the different habits that can have a positive impact on our households, let’s remember these important words from the apostle Peter: “Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms” (1 Peter 4:8–10).

1. As an academic concept, *love* can be hard to define or pin down. But most of us have an innate ability to recognize the presence of love when we encounter it—or the absence of love when we don't. Growing up in your household as a child, what routines or practices were especially meaningful to you? What made you feel loved?

2. Now as an adult, what are some of the primary ways you experience love within your household? What are some of the primary ways you express love to those closest to you?

Realizing that the normal moments of life are also the most spiritual moments of life helps give a validity and dignity to the otherwise mundane and repetitive nature of housework and parenting. I know we parents constantly wonder whether all of this matters, and I will try to assure you over and over: yes, it does! Your work in the household and parenting matters tremendously. It will echo into eternity.

But on the other hand, this is challenging because it reminds us of why parenting is so very, very hard. Parenting, seen properly, is an unceasing spiritual battle. A battle that God is using to refine us, and a battle that God will win for us, but if it feels like a fight to you, that's because it is.⁴

3. In what ways does participation in your household feel like a "battle" or a "fight" right now? What do you think might be the root causes of those struggles?

You will, inevitably, at times while going through this study be tempted to wonder, “Isn’t this legalistic? Isn’t it the power of God that changes us, not the power of our habits?” I will try to remind you that no, it is not legalistic. And yes, it is the power of God that changes us, habits included. . . .

Caring about how habits are shaping your family is not legalistic. What would be legalistic is saying that God loves you more because of your habits. Or that you can earn your salvation by picking the right habits. You can’t. And thank God, you don’t need to!

The good news of Christianity is that Jesus’ death on the cross has paid for all of our failures (including our bad parenting habits), and his resurrection from the grave is the promise of a new life (including new parenting habits). It is that work of God that saves us, by grace and through faith—not our works (of habits or otherwise). That God died for us while we were still sinners is a demonstration of his great love, and that love is why we care about habits.⁵

4. Building helpful habits and routines is a critical element within a healthy household, but those habits are not the end goal. The end goal is joining in God’s work and God’s love. Where do you currently see God at work within your home?

5. What are your goals for participating in this study? What would you like to see changed or developed within your household as a result of working through these pages?

STUDY TWO

HABITS AROUND WAKING

Waking up each day is one of those routines we often take for granted. Sometimes we open our eyes refreshed and ready for whatever may come our way. Other times we are groggy or tired or even resentful at the necessity of rolling out of the covers. It is easy to believe that whatever side of the spectrum on which we fall—whether or not we “wake up on the wrong side of the bed”—isn’t really important and depends on factors beyond our control.

But the truth is that the way we wake up does matter. It matters to us as individuals in terms of how we approach everything that will happen throughout the rest of the day. And it matters to the other members of our household who look to us for guidance and support.

It is also true that we have a lot of control over the way we wake up. Or, at least, we have a lot of control over what we experience the first moments after we wake up. All too often we jump immediately into a human-centered version of reality by checking email, watching the news, clicking on what others are doing through social media, or jumping immediately into the never-ending list of chores that need to be completed each day. Making that decision has tremendous impact on our thoughts and actions throughout the rest of the day.

A more helpful approach is to immediately jump into the true version of reality that is centered on God. We can do this through many means, including prayer, worship, meditation, and exposure to his Word. As the apostle Paul wrote to one group of believers, “Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you” (Ephesians 5:14).

1. What are some words that describe your typical “wake up” routine over the past several months? What emotions do you typically experience the first minutes of a typical day?

2. The way we start the day as individuals is important, but each of our individual choices also contributes to the overall environment of our household. So, what are some words that describe the typical “wake up” experience in your household over the past several months? What is the overall attitude or atmosphere in your home on a typical morning?

At best, the morning rituals of a household support the reality that God loves us and that his love is the defining fact of the universe. Here our habits of waking serve as gospel liturgies that push us into the arms of a father who loves us, and then send us out into the world to love others. But at worst, our habits of waking indulge alternative realities where the universe depends on us and what we do today. This is the gospel of humankind, where our rituals tell us that we have to keep up to survive and turn the household into a school of rush, fear, and frustration.

So we must wake up to how we wake up. We must see that the first role of a parent is not to get everyone up on time but to root our household habits of waking in the truth of the gospel. For in the story of God, our call is not simply to wake up our bodies each day but to awaken our hearts to God’s love.⁶

3. Waking up well is both a challenge and an opportunity. Where do you see opportunities to experience God’s love each morning? What about the others in your household—where do you see opportunities to help them experience God’s love at the start of each day?

HABITS OF THE HOUSEHOLD

Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in you. Show me the way I should go, for to you I entrust my life.

Psalms 143:8

"So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."

Matthew 6:31–33

Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it.

Proverbs 22:6

4. In the group time this week, we looked at three morning routines: (1) a kneeling prayer upon waking, (2) Scripture before phone, and (3) a morning prayer with our children. What do these passages say about the importance of these morning routines?

5. You know your household better than anyone else, which means you have an expert understanding of what your household needs. What are some additional morning routines that you could implement to bring about a "new normal" in your home?

STUDY THREE

HABITS AROUND BEDTIME

As we have seen, each morning presents a new opportunity for us to recognize the goodness of God's love and the reality of his presence in our lives. The presence of the Lord is even pictured every day by the natural world. Dawn is a wonderful illustration of God's light breaking through the darkness and penetrating throughout every area of our lives.

In a similar way, nighttime offers wonderful opportunities for us and our families to use the natural rhythms of the day as a means of reinforcing core truths. Even as the sun goes down and our homes are once again plunged into darkness, we can affirm the reality that God is with us even in the darkest and the bleakest times in our lives. God is present with each of us individually, and God is present within our households.

When unmanaged, bedtime rituals can become times of chaos. Kids who don't want to brush their teeth or clean their rooms or hop into bed will do anything to disrupt those expected routines. Parents who are exhausted from the work of the day often lose patience in those moments. Nighttime can be a bit of a mess. But when managed well, bedtime can become a reassuring routine—one filled with comfort and acceptance for the blessing of rest.

1. What are some words that describe a typical bedtime in your household—specifically the final thirty minutes before the children are supposed to be in bed? What emotions are most likely to be experienced by you and your family in those minutes?
2. Take a moment to think about the perfect bedtime experience for yourself and your family—an ideal end to the day. Use the space below to sketch out that ideal bedtime, either visually or with words. What would your routines look like? What would be said? What other senses would be involved (touch, smell, taste)? What emotions?

A good parent can settle the soul—and that’s exactly what our heavenly father can do for us. Send us to bed with a settled soul. I find that I need this reminder the most at the end of the day, when all of us are exhausted and running on reserves. This is when I need gospel liturgies to guide me into rest, body and soul.

But just like all these habits of the household, bedtime liturgies aren’t solutions to make bedtime easy or prevent us from being bad parents, they are rhythms that remind us we can rest in God’s goodness anyway. And we need those. Because otherwise we get stuck in our anger, our self-loathing, and our failures. That’s why I try to repeat this statement as often as possible: Our habits won’t change God’s love for us, but God’s love for us can and should change our habits.⁷

3. *A good parent can settle the soul.* Think back to a recent evening where this did not happen—a bedtime that reflected more chaos than comfort. With the benefit of hindsight, what steps could you have taken that might have improved that evening?

For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

Romans 8:14–17

4. Our best parenting comes when we think less about being parents of children and more about being children of God. What are some examples of grace that God has demonstrated to you? What does it mean that God is our heavenly “Father”?

5. Liturgies and blessings are good options for helping your household wind down and end each day well, but not the only options. Take a moment to think specifically about your needs and the needs of your children. What are some other routines you could implement in your household that could be helpful for ending the day well?

CONNECT AND DISCUSS

Take some time today to connect with a fellow group member and discuss some of the key insights from this first session. Use any of the following prompts to help guide your discussion.

What stood out to you the most from the content in this session? Why?

A central principle of this study is that God will do his most transformational work within the boundaries of ordinary homes. How have you seen that principle at work this week?

Take a moment to talk through some of the “waking” habits suggested in this week’s teaching. Which ones are you most excited to try in your household? Why?

Now think about some of the bedtime blessings and liturgies mentioned. Which of those particularly caught your attention? Why?

What do you feel most excited to explore or learn in the sessions ahead?

CATCH UP AND READ AHEAD

Use this time to go back and complete any of the study and reflection questions from previous days that you weren't able to finish. Make a note below of any revelations you've had and reflect on any growth or personal insights you've gained.

Make sure to read chapters 2 and 5 in *Habits of the Household* before the next group gathering. Use the space below to make note of anything in those chapters that stands out to you or encourages you.

LEADER'S GUIDE

Thank you for your willingness to lead your group through this study! What you have chosen to do is valuable and will make a great difference in the lives of others. The rewards of being a leader are different from those of participating, and we hope that as you lead you will find your own journey with Christ deepened by this experience.

Habits of the Household is a five-session Bible study built around video content and small-group interaction. As the group leader, imagine yourself as the host of a party. Your job is to take care of your guests by managing the details so that when your guests arrive, they can focus on one another and on the interaction around the topic for that session.

Your role as the group leader is not to answer all the questions or reteach the content—the video, book, and study guide will take care of most of that. Your job is to guide the experience and cultivate your small group into a connected and engaged community. This will make it a place for members to process, question, and reflect.

There are several elements in this leader's guide that will help you as you structure your study and reflection time, so be sure to follow along and take advantage of each one.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Before your first meeting, make sure the group members have a copy of this study guide. Alternately, you can hand out the study guides at your first meeting and give the members some time to look over the material and ask any preliminary questions. Also make sure they are aware that they have access to the streaming videos at any time. During your first meeting, ask each member to provide their name, phone number, and email address so you can keep in touch with them.

Generally, the ideal size for a group is eight to ten people, which will ensure that everyone has enough time to participate in discussions. If you have more people, you might want to break up the main group into smaller subgroups. Encourage those who show up at the first meeting to commit to attending the duration of the study, as this will help the group members get to know one another, create stability for the group, and help you know how to best prepare to lead them through the material.

Each of the sessions begins with an opening reflection in the Welcome section. The questions that follow in the Connect section serve as an icebreaker to get the group members thinking about the topic. Some people may want to tell a long story in response to one of these questions, but the goal is to keep the answers brief. Ideally, you want everyone in the group to get a chance to answer, so try to keep the responses to a minute or less. If you have talkative group members, say up front that everyone needs to be brief so everyone has time to share.

Give the group members a chance to answer, but also tell them to feel free to pass if they wish. With the rest of the study, it's generally not best to have everyone answer every question—a free-flowing discussion is more desirable. But with the opening icebreaker questions, you can go around the circle. Encourage shy people to share, but don't force them.

At your first meeting, let the group members know each session contains a personal study section they can use to continue to engage with the content until the next meeting. While this is optional, it will help them cement the concepts presented during the group study time. Let them know that if they choose to do so, they can watch the video for the next session via streaming. Invite them to bring any questions and insights to your next meeting, especially if they had a breakthrough moment or didn't understand something.

STRUCTURING THE DISCUSSION TIME

You will need to determine how long you want to meet so you can plan your time accordingly. Suggested times for each section have been provided in this study guide, and if you adhere to these times, your group will meet for ninety minutes. If you want to meet for two hours, follow the times given in the right-hand column:

SECTION	90 MINUTES	120 MINUTES
CONNECT (discuss one or more of the opening questions for the session)	10 minutes	15 minutes
WATCH (watch the teaching material together and take notes)	20 minutes	20 minutes
DISCUSS (discuss the study questions you selected ahead of time)	40 minutes	50 minutes
RESPOND (write down key takeaways)	10 minutes	20 minutes
PRAY (pray together and dismiss)	10 minutes	15 minutes

As the group leader, it is up to you to keep track of the time and stay on schedule. You might want to set a timer for each segment so both you and the group members know when your time is up. (There are some good phone apps for timers that play a gentle chime or other upbeat sounds instead of a disruptive noise.)

Don't be concerned if the group members are quiet or slow to share. People are often quiet when they are pulling together their ideas, and this might be a new experience for them. Just ask a question and let it hang in the air until someone shares. You can then say, "Thank you. What about others? What came to you when you watched that portion of the teaching?"

PREPARATION FOR EACH SESSION

As the leader, there are a few things you should do to prepare for each meeting:

- **Read through the session.** This will help you become more familiar with the content and know how to structure the discussion times.
- **Decide how the videos will be used.** Determine whether you want the members to watch the videos ahead of time (via the streaming access code) or together as a group.
- **Decide which questions you want to discuss.** Based on the length of your group discussions, you may not be able to get through all the questions. So look over the questions and choose which ones you definitely want to cover.

- **Be familiar with the questions you want to discuss.** When the group meets, you'll be watching the clock, so make sure you are familiar with the questions that you have selected. In this way, you will ensure that you have the material more deeply in your mind than your group members.
- **Pray for your group.** Pray for your group members and ask God to lead them as they study his Word.

In most cases, there won't be a "right" answer to the question. Answers will vary, especially when the members are being asked to share their personal experiences.

GROUP DYNAMICS

Leading a group through *Habits of the Household* will be rewarding both to you and your group members. But you still may encounter challenges along the way! Discussions can get off track. Group members may not be sensitive to the needs and ideas of others. Some might worry they will be expected to talk about matters that make them feel awkward. Others may express comments that result in disagreements. To help ease this strain on you and the group, consider the following ground rules:

- When someone raises a question or comment that is off the main topic, suggest that you deal with it another time, or, if you feel led to go in that direction, let the group know you will be spending some time discussing it.
- If someone asks a question that you don't know how to answer, admit it and move on. At your discretion, feel free to invite group members to comment on questions that call for personal experience.
- If you find one or two people are dominating the discussion time, direct a few questions to others in the group. Outside the main group time, ask the more dominating members to help you draw out the quieter ones. Work to make them a part of the solution instead of part of the problem.
- When a disagreement occurs, encourage the group members to process the matter in love. Encourage those on opposite sides to restate what they heard the other side say about the matter, and then invite each side to evaluate if that perception is accurate. Lead the group in examining other Scriptures related to the topic and look for common ground.

When any of these issues arise, encourage your group members to follow these words from Scripture: "Love one another" (John 13:34), "If it is possible, as far as it

depends on you, live at peace with everyone" (Romans 12:18), "Whatever is true . . . noble . . . right . . . if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things" (Philippians 4:8), and "Be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry" (James 1:19). This will make your group time more rewarding and beneficial for everyone who attends.

WEEKEND RETREAT

One additional idea to consider is planning a *Habits of the Household* weekend retreat for couples in your group or church to help them get away from the busyness of life and better connect with the content, with each other, and with God. The goal for the retreat is to create an experience for your group that allows couples to relax and get away from their daily concerns and stresses. The weekend should thus include an element of fun and "down time," where couples can choose how they would like to spend their time together. (It is important to build this into the schedule, as the material covered in the weekend away will impact each couple differently, and so many will welcome the opportunity to step away and relax between sessions.)

Below are schedules for two options: (1) a three-day Friday night to Sunday morning retreat, and (2) a one-day Saturday retreat. The three-day retreat creates unhurried time and space for people to walk through the content, relax, have fun, and discuss ways to incorporate the habits into their daily lives. However, if you find that the majority of the people you are inviting cannot get away for a whole weekend, consider the one-day Saturday option (or some other combination if, for example, most people can attend Friday night and most of the day Saturday). It will take some planning and, likely, some flexibility on your part, but the end result will be worth it.

Sample Three-Day Retreat Schedule

Friday

- 6:00 PM Arrive
- 7:00 PM Dinner or snacks
- 8:00 PM Introduction / icebreaker game
- 9:00 PM Session 1: Waking Up to Habits of the Household

Saturday

- 8:30 AM Breakfast
- 9:30 AM Session 2: Habits for Mealtimes and Family Devotions

HABITS OF THE HOUSEHOLD

10:45 AM	Break and snacks
11:30 AM	Session 3: Habits for Screentime and Formation
1:00 PM	Lunch
2:00 PM	Free time (activities can be organized)
4:00 PM	Snacks
5:00 PM	Session 4: Habits for Using Discipline as Discipleship
6:00 PM	Dinner
8:00 PM	Free time

Sunday

9:00 AM	Breakfast
10:00 AM	Session 5: Habits to Help You Imagine the Future
11:30 AM	Debrief as a group
12:00 PM	Lunch and depart

Sample One-Day Retreat Schedule

Saturday

7:30 AM	Breakfast
8:00 AM	Session 1: Waking Up to Habits of the Household
9:15 AM	Break and snacks
9:30 AM	Session 2: Habits for Mealtimes and Family Devotions
10:30 AM	Break and snacks
11:00 AM	Session 3: Habits for Screentime and Formation
12:00 PM	Lunch
1:00 PM	Session 4: Habits for Using Discipline as Discipleship
2:00 PM	Snacks
2:30 PM	Session 5: Habits to Help You Imagine the Future
3:30 PM	Wrap-up and depart

In closing, thank you for taking the time to lead your group! You are making a difference in your group members' lives and having an impact on their journey as they learn to establish simple but lasting practices that will draw them and their families closer to God.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Justin Whitmel Earley is a lawyer, author, and speaker from Richmond, Virginia. He graduated from the University of Virginia with a degree in English Literature before spending four years in Shanghai, China, as a missionary. Justin got his law degree from the Georgetown University Law Center and he runs his own business law practice in Richmond, Virginia, at Earley Legal Group. His first book, *The Common Rule—Habits of Purpose for an Age of Distraction*, was published with InterVarsity Press in 2019. His second book, *Habits of the Household—Practicing the Story of God in Everyday Family Rhythms*, released with Zondervan in November of 2021. His third book is *Made for People, Why We Drift into Loneliness and How to Fight for a Life of Friendship*. Justin frequently speaks at businesses and legal events on habits, technology, and mental health and at churches and conferences on habits, spiritual formation, and parenting. He is married to Lauren and has four sons—Whit, Asher, Coulter, and Shep.

FIND MEANING AND PURPOSE IN THE DAILY CHAOS OF YOUR HOUSEHOLD



Parenting happens in habits. We make meals, shuttle our kids to events, answer their questions, discipline them, and do bedtime. But did you know that even these ordinary routines can serve as extraordinary opportunities to live out God's love in profound ways? In *Habits of the Household*, you will discover simple practices you can implement around your daily routines and seemingly mundane moments that will lead to a lifetime of growing closer to God—both for you and everyone in your home.

Each session includes practical examples of prayers, liturgies, and activities that you and your family can put into practice right away. As you create rhythms around your everyday routines, you will find your family has a greater sense of peace and purpose as your home becomes a place where you learn how to love each other and love God.

Streaming Video Access Code Included*


Watch on any device DVD also available, sold separately.



This study guide includes:

- Individual access to five streaming video sessions
- Schedule for using as a weekend retreat
- A guide to best practices for leading a group
- Video notes and a comprehensive structure for group discussion time
- Personal study for deeper reflection between sessions
- Includes plans for hosting a weekend retreat for your group or church

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Resources

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