

# The Common Rule (Earley)

Earley, J. W. (2019). The common rule: habits of purpose for an age of distraction. IVP Books.

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## Agendas, schedules

Justin Whitmel Earley

- Author Annie Dillard wrote, "How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives. What we do with this hour, and that one, is what we are doing. A schedule defends from chaos and whim. It is a net for catching days. It is a scaffolding on which a worker can stand and labor with both hands at sections of time." @
- "We will never build lives of love out of anything except ordinary days" @

## Attention

Justin Whitmel Earley

- "Our life is defined by what we pay attention to." @
- When we can stop chattering and stop unnecessary distractions, we can attend to the voice of our conscience, God's voice, the voice of our neighbor in need. @

## Cell phones

Justin Whitmel Earley

- Cell phones as causing us to be absent from others and from our surroundings, instead of present - texting when with someone, working while on vacation, etc.
- Earley has a rule of 'One hour with cell phone completely turned off' when getting home from work, so he can give his full attention to his family.
- "Having periods of keeping your phone off at work is the keystone habit for loving neighbors through your work." @
- Avoid all 'unplanned scrolling'

## Christology

Justin Whitmel Earley

- "There's no one who surrendered more freedom than Jesus, who went from the all-powerful second person of the Trinity to the vulnerable form of a helpless infant...By surrendering his freedom for the sake of love, Christ saved the world." @
- "He lived among violence. He died violently." @

## Email

Justin Whitmel Earley

- Emails as prayers that others want us to answer for them. @

## Emotions

Justin Whitmel Earley

- Guilt focuses on the past, anxiety on the present/future. When we wake up feeling one or the other, → prayer time. Prayer can re-frame our day. @

## Failure

Justin Whitmel Earley

- Failure is the means to our formation as we create beautiful lives. Formation is the intersection of failure and beauty. @

## Fasting

Justin Whitmel Earley

- Fasting is suffering.
- Fasting causes us to see our finiteness and our need for food, thus for God.
- Fasting helps us lean into suffering and gain sympathy for those who suffer
- Communal fasts where friends fast at the same time and encourage each other

## Friendship

Justin Whitmel Earley

- Friendship as 'vulnerability over the course of time' - face-to-face conversations make us vulnerable because of facial gestures, body language, voice tone, etc, whereas online comments hide that and can be pre-prepared @
- Should we leave friends to move for our job? Or move toward jobs where our friends are? "I began to wonder whether a life with the best job was worth a life without a best friend." @

## Food, eating

Justin Whitmel Earley

- Eating feels like a distraction from work when we are busy
- Food shows our dependence on God, on others, and on creation @
  - Something in creation gave its life so we might live (like Christ)
- Family meal time as an anchor
- Telling coworkers etc that you will not be available at whatever your family meal time is
- Eating as communal
  - Inviting others to join your family for meals as a way of being open
  - Talking to servers and others at restaurants

## Habits

Justin Whitmel Earley

- Habits surround us imperceptibly as water surrounds fish @
- Habits save us mental energy. They free us up from unnecessary thinking.
- Habits as liturgical rituals that reveal what you really worship @
  - Compulsive email checking - my self worth is tied into being responsive at all times?
- Habits take 2-3 weeks to form.

## The Internet

Justin Whitmel Earley

- Parents learn to ignore their childrens' temper tantrums. Early recommends treating online rage comments in the same way.
- We should be intentional and curate our reading, social media, streaming content, etc, rather than be impulsive have others who don't care for us (Netflix, YouTube algorithms, etc) curate it for us and tell us what to watch.
  - Earley recommends limiting media intake to four hours a week and curating it carefully. He says the number of hours may be different for different people, but the idea of limiting it to a specific time and being intentional about what we attend to is the main principle.
- The vast and addictive online content draws us into ourselves, but we need our priorities to pull us out of ourselves and towards others in love and concern. @

## Justice

Justin Whitmel Earley

- Justice as a beautiful tapestry that people tear, causing the vulnerable of society to fall through the hole, and lawyers (Earley is a lawyer) need to repair it. @

## Limits and constraints

Justin Whitmel Earley

- Limits don't reduce freedom, they create freedom. They free us up from some options to help us freely focus on the important options @
- Illustrations: Chuck Close (painter who was paralyzed but found a way to keep painting), and Jean-Dominique Bauby, who had a stroke but wrote a novel when she only had the ability to blink one eye. @

## Love/mission mindset

Justin Whitmel Earley

- The Christian life is a tension between a monastic mindset, that encourages us to remove ourselves from social media, society, etc, and a missions mindset, that reminds us that the people we are to love are in society, social media, etc. How can we be 'in' these realms but not 'of' these realms? @

## Meaning of life

Justin Whitmel Earley

- "great artists constrain their lives in order to produce the vision of beauty that has captured them. I believe that paying attention to the work of habit is similar. It is best thought of as giving attention to the art of habit. It isn't about trying to live right; it's about curating a life. It is the art of living beautifully." @

## News, journalism

Justin Whitmel Earley

- News thrives on anger and fear, which keep bringing us back to the headlines
- Recommends long-form news, which usually costs more, rather than short-form news.

## Politics and conflict

## Justin Whitmel Earley

- "When we're Christians first we can finally be good citizens second. That's the only way we can avoid being, in the words of Reverend William Sloane Coffin Jr., either uncritical lovers of country or loveless critics of country. But when we're citizens of heaven first, we finally become loving critics of country next—which is the truest kind of patriotism." @
- "We must resist becoming people who talk of justice out of rage and work on becoming people who talk of justice out of love." @

## Prayer

### Justin Whitmel Earley

- Prayer as a 'keystone' habit that when practiced, affects other habits
- Kneeling or at least using upturned hands to 'receive' as a bodily posture that aids in setting prayer time apart psychologically
- "God, thank you for another day I did not earn. You are so generous to me." @

## Priorities

### Justin Whitmel Earley

- Earley did the math in his 20s. At 30 books a year, over 50 years, he would only read 1500 books, and there were more books on one wall of the bookstore than that. He got a glimpse of how finite he was, and realized he would need to curate not only his reading but his viewing of streaming media, etc. @
- Each choice we make is at the expense of many other things.

## Sabbath

### Justin Whitmel Earley

- The type of work we do will shape our sabbath: "A man who works with his mind should sabbath with his hands, and a man who works with his hands should sabbath with his mind." - ABRAHAM HESCHEL @
- The upper class used to show their status by leisure. Now they show it by their 'lives of constant busyness'. @
- Sabbath is not so much about doing nothing as it is doing restful things.
- Earley's family lights a candle at the beginning of their sabbath time as a cue that it is started, to shift focus.
- Sabbath reminds us we can't do it all. We can stop. It does not all depend on us.
- Figuring out what activities should be and not be part of your sabbath takes time. Earley recommends starting with 3 activities to do and 3 to not do, and go from there.
- Consider a sabbath from screens of all kinds.

## The self

### Justin Whitmel Earley

- We are multiple selves in constant conflict: the person we think our spouse thinks we should be, the person who tries to live up to work expectations, and parents' expectations, etc etc. @
- We don't find our true selves by looking inward but by looking to Jesus and modeling

ourselves after him

## **Sleep**

Justin Whitmel Earley

- Sleep as a reminder that the world does not need us, that it will continue to function without us. @

## **Temptation**

Justin Whitmel Earley

- Avoiding any decision-making at night, since our energy is spent and we are vulnerable. @

## **Work**

Justin Whitmel Earley

- "no matter what our profession is, work is where we make something of the world." @
- Work as showing love to others. We can visualize the people we are loving - bosses, coworkers, clients, customers, etc @
- The two joys of work are focusing on a task (flow) and finishing a task. @