

Living Well: Christian Practices for Everyday Life

Small Group Guide: “Managing Household Life”

(LifelongFaith Associates)

Preparation

Materials

- The following handouts are included with this session:
 1. *Images of the Good Life*
 2. *The View of the Good Life in Our Society and Culture*
 3. *Managing Household Time and Responsibilities*
 4. *Managing Household Money*
 5. *Managing Household Property and Possessions*
 6. *Managing an “Environmentally-Friendly” Household*

Preparation of Learning Activities

- Paper, pens/pencils for everyone
- Newsprint sheets and markers
- Record 6-10 of the most popular commercials on TV that have a message about the good life for viewing and analysis during the session.
- Provide a variety of magazines with lots of advertisements for each table to use in creating a poster of ads about the good life.

A Practice Panel

This would be a good session to invite two or three people who can share their Christian practice of managing household life. Find people who can speak to one of the three components of the Christian practice of managing household life: managing time, money, and possessions. The goal of their “witness” story is to share the specific things you do to connect their Christian faith with managing time, money, or possessions. How do you see God at work in the practice of managing household life? How do you bring their faith into these household activities?

Small Group Plan

Part 1. Yearning: Stories of Managing Household Life

Have some present this introduction to the session (from page 8.2 and 8.4 in *Living Well*):

It wasn't so long ago that the home was the center of our lives and society. A lot has changed in the past fifty or sixty years. Today, managing our household life seems to have gotten lost in the sea of other commitments and activities outside the home. Yet, each of us hungers for the stability of a home life that gives our lives order and nurtures loving relationships.

There was a time when, for most people, nearly everything happened at home. All of the important things like falling in love, births, parties, deaths, funerals, work, education, health care, employment, food production, and even waste management were primarily family responsibilities. There were no birthing rooms, party centers, funeral homes, factories, office buildings or extensive government programs. And up until the last two hundred years or so, most communities had no formal schooling or hospital facilities. Managing household life was the center of society. Today it is not unusual for women and men to feel a bit embarrassed when you admit that you spend their days keeping house.

Read or present the three opening stories, “The Challenge of Making a Home,” “Multi-Tasking,” and “Backyard Camping,” on pages 8.2–8.3 in *Living Well*. Use a different reader for each story.

After reading or hearing the stories share your feelings and thoughts with the group using the following four questions:

- What were your feelings as you heard the three stories?
- What story was most meaningful for you? Which one spoke to you?
- What's the best part of managing household life today?
- What's most challenging or difficult about managing household life today?

Part 2. Reflecting

1. Reflecting—The Good Life

Part 1. Your View of the Good Life

Using the handout, *Images of the Good Life*, identify what the “good life” means to you. Check off the items that represent your current view of the good life—what you actually believe and practice, not what you think you should believe! Add your own descriptions of the good life in the blank spaces.

After everyone has completed the handout, share your list with the group and take one or two of the most important items and explain to the group why it is important.

Part 2. The View of the Good Life in our Society and Culture

Have someone introduce the activity:

What does our popular culture and society tell us about good life? In this next activity we are going to explore what we can learn about the good life from advertisements and TV commercials. First we are going to examine commercials and the messages that you send to us.

After you watch each of the video presentations of the commercials, use the handout, *The View of the Good Life in our Society and Culture*, work as a group to identify two or three central messages about the “Good Life” you found in the commercial. Do this for each commercial.

Now review the magazines to identify images that the group thinks are especially good at portraying images of the good life. Discuss the images and select up to 5-6 of the best ads. Remove these ads from the magazine or newspaper. Write the name of the ads on the handout, and, together as a group, identify the key message it is teaching about the “Good Life.”

Conclude the activity by sharing what you have learned by discussing the following questions:

- How do the commercials and advertisements present a picture of the good life? How do you feel about what you have seen?
- If you had these products, what difference would it make in your life? What did these advertisements try to convince you that you personally need in order to have the good life? Do you really need this?

2. Reflection Activity for Managing Household Time and Responsibilities

Have someone introduce the managing time activity (found on page 8.5 of *Living Well*):

There never seems to be enough time. Yet, each of us has 24 hours to allocate each day. It's not how much time we have. It's how we spend our time. We all have 168 hours each week to spend. Use the chart on the handout to analyze how your household spends its time in a typical week. Do your best to estimate how much time you spend on the activities listed below, then add other activities particular to your household. Try to get close to 168 hours.

Use the handout, *Managing Household Time and Responsibilities*, to analyze how you (and your household) manage time. Then reflect on your time chart using the following questions.

1. What does your use of time say about your priorities?
2. How well does your current allocation of time reflect your hopes and dreams for your life together? How does your use of time reflect your values and what you most deeply believe?
3. What are the blessings in your use of time each week?
4. What are the stressors in your use of time each week?
5. What would you change?

Share your insights about managing time with the whole group. Be sure to share at least one thing you would change about your time use.

4. Reflection Activity for Managing Household Money

Have someone introduce the managing household money activity (found on page 8.5 of *Living Well*):

How we spend our money says a lot about what's important in life. There are the essential expenses, such as housing, food, utilities, and transportation. But there are also nonessential or “it would be nice” expenses, such as new clothes or entertainment. Draw a pie chart (below) that indicates the percentage of your household's money that is spent on essential expenses and the percentage that is spent on nonessential items. Identify what nonessentials you actually spend money on.

Use the handout, *Managing Household Money*, to develop a pie chart of your essential and nonessential expenses. Then analyze your pie chart using the following questions.

1. What does your use of money say about your priorities?
2. How does your use of money reflect your values and what you most deeply believe?
3. What are the blessings in your use of money?
4. What are the stressors?
5. What would you change in your allocation of money?

Share your insights about managing money with the whole group. Be sure to share at least one thing you would change about your management of money.

5. Reflection Activity for Managing Household Property and Possessions

Have someone introduce the managing household property and possessions activity (found on page 8.6 of *Living Well*):

Think about your material possessions and identify those possessions that you consider essential for household life, that are desirable but optional, and that are nonessential. Use the chart to list examples in each category.

Use the handout, *Managing Household Property and Possessions*, to analyze your “stuff.” Then analyze your chart using the following questions.

1. What do your material possessions say about your priorities?
2. How do your material possessions reflect your values and what you most deeply believe?
3. What would you change?

Share your insights about managing possessions with the whole group. Be sure to share at least one thing you would change about your management of possessions.

Now do an analysis of your next purchase using the instructions on the handout, *Managing Household Property and Possessions*.

Part 3. Exploring: The Christian Practice of Managing Household Life

The Exploring section of the “Managing Household Life” chapter on pages 8.8–8.11 in *Living Well* presents biblical teaching about managing time, money, and possessions.

Divide into three teams. Have each team take one of three aspects of managing household life: time, money, and possessions.

Begin by reading “How Do You Manage Household Life?” on page 8.8 in *Living Well*. Then read the text for your assignment from *Living Well* and develop your presentation summarizing the biblical teaching and commentary for time or money or possessions. Give your presentation to the group.

1. Managing Our Time (page 8.9)
2. Managing Our Money (pages 8.9-810)
3. Managing Our Property and Possessions (page 8.11)

After the presentations share your thoughts using the following questions. Take the first question and have each person share on that question before moving to the second and then the third question.

1. What did you learn about the Christian teaching on managing time that can be beneficial for you (and your household)? How were you affirmed by the biblical teaching? How were you challenged?
2. What did you learn about the Christian teaching on managing money that can be beneficial for you (and your household)? How were you affirmed by the biblical teaching? How were you challenged?
3. What did you learn about the Christian teaching on managing possessions that can be beneficial for you (and your household)? How were you affirmed by the biblical teaching? How were you challenged?

Part 4. *Living*: Application of the Christian Practice of Managing Household Life to Daily Life

1. Optional Activity: A Practice Panel

2. Ideas for Living the Christian Practice of Managing Household Life

Organize three teams to develop ideas and strategies for the Christian practice of managing household life: time, money, and possessions. Each team is going to work together to develop strategies and ideas that flow from the biblical teaching for living the Christian practice of managing household life in their area (time, money, possessions). The goal is to develop specific ways people can connect their Christian faith with managing time, money, or possessions, see God at work in the practice of managing household life, and bring their faith into these household activities.

Begin by reviewing the strategies for your area (time, money, possessions) on pages 8.12-8.14 in the *Living Well* book.

Managing Time

- Re-evaluate your current use of time
- Budgeting household time
- Develop a family or household schedule
- Making room for priorities
- Time budgeting for children

Managing Money

- Re-evaluate your current use of money
- Budgeting
- Checkbook examination of conscience
- Alternative Christmas giving
- Gifts that give

Managing Property

- Sharing our stuff
- Sharing the outdoors
- Share the responsibility to care

Develop your ideas and strategies and record them on newsprint. Present your list to the whole group and invite additional suggestions from group members.

3. An Environmental Audit

Before moving to your own action plan, conduct an “environmental audit” of your household using the handout, *Managing an “Environmentally-Friendly” Household* (see page 8.15 in *Living Well*). Identify what you are already doing and things you can begin doing to live in an “environmentally-friendly” household. Your new ideas can become part of your action plan.

4. Integrating the Christian Practice of Managing Household Life into Daily Life

Now create an action plan for living the Christian practice of managing household life. Review the ideas that were presented in the *Living Well* book, and on the newsprint sheets from the prior activity. Consider ways you can improve how you live the Christian practice of managing household life. Use the following process to guide your planning:

1. List 2-3 actions you would like to take to live the Christian practice of Managing Household Life (time, money, possessions) as an individual or household.
2. Describe what you will do to put each action into practice, and the steps you will take to ensure that it will happen.

Conclude by sharing one action idea with your group.

Part 5. Praying

Use the prayer on page 8.16 in *Living Well* to close the session or the prayer service below.

Prayer Service

Leader

Let us pray through our households in the name of the God who gracefully manages the great household of creation. We will respond to each prayer with “We thank you, Lord.”

Reader

We pray through our kitchens, the place where we prepare the food that sustains our lives. For the goodness of kitchen work, we pray to the Lord.

All

We thank you, Lord.

Reader

We pray through our mealtime table, the place where we give and receive physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual nourishment. For the abundant and generous sharing at our tables, we pray to the Lord.

All

We thank you, Lord.

Reader

We pray through our living rooms and family rooms, the place where we gather to build relationships. For the laughter and tears that encourage and heal us, we pray to the Lord.

All

We thank you, Lord.

Reader

We pray through our bathrooms, the place where we begin and end our days. For the cleansing and refreshing that revitalizes us, we pray to the Lord.

All

We thank you, Lord.

Reader

We pray through our bedrooms, the place where God speaks in our dreams. For restful sleep that keeps our lives in balance, we pray to the Lord.

All

We thank you, Lord.

Leader

Our houses and apartments are holy places when we manage them with love, joy and gratitude. May we practice the ways of love in our households every day so that our saving faith will flood our neighborhoods with God's presence. We pray in the name of our God who promises to have many rooms for us in the household of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Images of the Good Life

What does the “good life” mean for you or your family? Check off the items that represent your view of the good life. Feel free to add new items of the good life that are important for you or your family?

- Owning a nice home
- Having a new car
- A loving family
- Financial security
- A pension
- Medical insurance
- Having the latest high tech consumer product (HD televisions, I-pods, computer)
- Having (or getting) a good education
- Having a good paying job
- Having friends
- Playing sports
- Good health
- Volunteering time to help people
- Recreation
- Spending time together as a family (e.g., family meals, holidays, family activities)
- Participating actively in the life of the church (e.g., Sunday Mass, programs, gatherings)
- Taking a vacation once or more each year
- Buying the newest fashion clothes
- Being physically fit
- Having time for entertainment, such as going to the movies or concerts
- Having new toys or games or music or movie DVDs

Add other items that are important to you or your family?

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

The View of the Good Life in Our Society & Culture

The Messages

Identify the products and message advertised in the TV commercials and magazine ads.

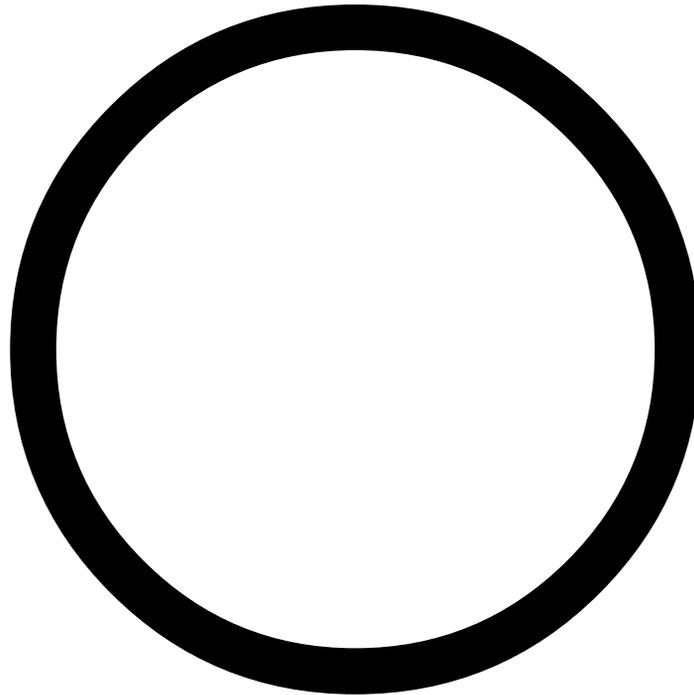
<u>Product</u>	<u>Message/Values about the Good Life</u>
1. _____	_____
2. _____	_____
3. _____	_____
4. _____	_____
5. _____	_____
6. _____	_____
7. _____	_____
8. _____	_____
9. _____	_____
10. _____	_____
11. _____	_____
12. _____	_____
13. _____	_____
14. _____	_____
15. _____	_____

Reflection Questions

- How do the commercials/advertisements present a picture of the good life? How do you feel about what you have seen?
- If you had these products, what difference would it make in your life? What did these commercials/advertisements try to convince you that you personally need in order to have the good life? Do you really need this?

Managing Household Money

How we spend our money says a lot about what's important in life. There are the essential expenses, such as housing, food, utilities, and transportation. But there are also nonessential or "it would be nice" expenses, such as new clothes or entertainment. Draw a pie chart (below) that indicates the percentage of your household's money that is spent on essential expenses and the percentage that is spent on nonessential items. Identify the essentials (on the left side of the circle) and nonessentials (on the right) you actually spend money on.



Reflection

1. What does your household's use of money say about your priorities?
2. How does your use of money reflect your values and what you most deeply believe?
3. What are the blessings in your use of money?
4. What are the stressors?
5. What would you change in your allocation of money?

Managing Household Property & Possessions

Think about your material possessions and identify those possessions that you consider essential for household life, that are desirable but optional, and that are nonessential. Use the chart to list examples in each category.

Essential	Desirable but Optional	Not Necessary

Reflection

1. What do your material possessions say about your priorities?
2. How do your material possessions reflect your values and what you most deeply believe?
3. What would you change?

Think about a purchase you want to make in the future. What are some of the factors that will go into your decision-making. Rank the following values from most important (#1) to the least important when you are considering making a purchase. Do you think this new purchase is essential for household life, desirable but optional, or nonessential?

- _____ Price
- _____ Impact on the environment
- _____ Personal spiritual development
- _____ Status in my community
- _____ A need versus a want
- _____ Moral integrity of the product manufacturer and how it treats workers
- _____ Convenience
- _____ Educational value of product
- _____ Expresses your vision of your household
- _____ Other: _____

Managing an “Environmentally-Friendly” Household

Think about all the things you currently do and what you can begin doing—today!

Already Do This	Will Begin Doing This	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	1. Drive less: walk, bike, carpool, and/or use mass transit. Consider a car-free day each week.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	2. Eat less feedlot beef. Eat lower on the food chain—going meatless for just one meal a week can make a difference. Eat eco-friendly seafood.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	3. Free yourself from junk mail by removing your name for mailing lists, and save a forest!
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	4. Install compact fluorescent light bulbs throughout your house.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	5. Conserve energy by lowering the temperature 3°F in the winter from where you would normally set it , and raise the temperature 3°F in the summer from where you would normally set it. Turn down the heat and air conditioning when you aren't home.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	6. Eliminate lawn and garden pesticides and look for environmentally-friendly alternatives.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	7. Reduce home water usage and use water-saving toilets, faucets, and shower heads. Take shorter showers.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	8. Eat more local, organic, in-season foods whenever possible and reduce the amount of energy needed to transport food, thereby reducing carbon emissions.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	9. Use a reusable water bottle and a high-quality home filter instead of buying bottled water.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	10. Wash your clothes in cold water and choose the no-heat cycle on your dishwasher.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	11. Bring your own bag or a cloth bag to the grocery store instead of using disposable bags.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	12. Choose energy efficient EnergyStar appliances which reduce carbon pollution, and have a big impact on your energy bill.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	13. Turn off computers and monitors when not in use. Make sure the hibernation and sleep settings are enabled.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	14. Weatherproof your home. Make sure your walls and ceilings are insulated, and consider double-pane windows. Eliminate drafts with caulking, weather strips, and storm windows and doors.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	15. Choose foods with less packaging to reduce waste.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	16. Recycle all your paper, glass, aluminum, and plastic, as well electronics.

Resources for Developing the Christian Practice of Managing Household Life

“Household Economics.” Sharon Daloz Parks. *Practicing Our Faith*. Dorothy C. Bass, editor. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997.

Jesus in the House: Gospel Reflections on Christ's Presence in the Home. Allan F. Wright. Cincinnati: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2007

The word “home” is used thirty-three times and the word “house” ninety-nine times in the Gospels of the New Revised Standard Version Bible. While many of us typically envision a Jesus who publicly preached in the streets and on the hillsides of Palestine, Jesus also ministered often in the home. “Why was it that Jesus spent so much of his time in the homes and houses of the people?” Allan Wright asks. “How did Jesus’ own experience of home assist in his formation throughout his childhood and facilitate his understanding of the importance of home? More importantly, what lessons are there for us? Do we still need the presence of Jesus in our homes today? How much different would homes be today if we taught, forgave, healed and shared meals like Jesus did?” Biblical scholar Allan Wright explores twenty-nine usages of home in the Scriptures, offering a reflection on the Gospel story, a prayer, reflection questions and challenges to the reader. Written for families, small groups or personal use, *Jesus in the House* encourages all of us to bring the presence of Christ into our homes.

Keeping House: The Litany of Everyday Life. Margaret Kim Peterson. San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2007.

Keeping House is a wide-ranging and witty exploration of the spiritual gifts that are gained when we take the time to care for hearth and home. Margaret Kim Peterson examines the activities and attitudes of keeping house and making a home. Debunking the commonly held notion that keeping house is a waste of time or at best a hobby, Peterson uncovers the broader cultural and theological factors that make housekeeping an interesting and worthwhile discipline. She reveals how the seemingly ordinary tasks of folding laundry, buying groceries, cooking, making beds, and offering hospitality can be seen as spiritual practices that embody and express concrete and positive ways of living out Christian faith in relationship to others at home, in the church and in the world.

Loving Your Home: An Upbeat, No-Nonsense Guide to Simplicity, Order, and Care. Carol Showalter with Mary Jane Preston. Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2009.

Learn to create a home you want to live in with this practical guide to creating order out of the chaos of daily life. Encouraging. Light-hearted. Roll-up-your-sleeves helpful. In this down-to-earth guide, you begin by assessing the essentials of your home and daily routine. Then, facing the things that you find most bothersome or difficult, you learn basic steps to de-stress your home and organize your life. For anyone, organized or disorganized, a gentle, mindful guide to bringing God’s order into the order of life. Includes:

- Tips on living well and making your house a home.
- Ideas on “lightening your load” by working together with friends.
- Spiritual words of wisdom on the everyday work of living.
- Checklists for cleaning/organizing specific areas of your home.
- Daily, weekly, and monthly goals.
- How to create a yearly plan for maintaining a home of simplicity, order, and care

Next to Godliness: Finding the Sacred in Housekeeping. Edited by Alice Peck. Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths, 2007.

Be you our kitchens after a meal or our communities after a crisis, we all face the times – and opportunities – when we must clean up. Through a beautiful, diverse and eclectic array of personal narratives, fiction, sacred texts and verse, this inspiring book offers new perspectives on the unique ways we can reach out for the Divine within the simple acts of washing the dishes, doing the laundry, making a home and more. Giving the process of cleaning house depth and resonance, these writings will speak to your heart and allow you to see beyond the task at hand and into a greater undertaking – to realize the sacred in all that we do. From sweeping the home, to organizing the office, to cleaning up the more daunting “Big Messes” in our communities, this engaging book touches upon every facet of our lives. Contributors include: Gaston Bachelard, Gwendolyn Brooks, Joan Chittister, Billy Collins, John Crawford, Mahatma Gandhi, Thich Nhat Hanh, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Homer, Martin Luther King, Jr., Cheryl Mendelson, Pablo Neruda, Kathleen Norris, Louise Rafkin, Marilynne Robinson, Rumi, and many others

Organizing from the Inside Out. (Second Edition) Julie Morgenstern. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2004. [Also a PBS Home Video]

Julie Morgenstern offers a fresh, insightful approach to the organizing process- by sharing the secrets and techniques she has used for nearly a decade with clients nationwide. *Organizing from the inside out* – designing a system based on your life goals, natural habits and psychological needs – ensures, once and for all, a system that won’t break down. In Parts One and Two, Morgenstern demystifies the process of getting organized by showing you just what has been holding you back. She explains the basic steps - analyze, strategize, attack - to use on every organizing project, no matter how big or small, and shares tricks of the trade for avoiding common pitfalls. In Parts Three and Four, Morgenstern shows how to apply these steps to every area of your life and work including offices, home offices, mobile offices, bathrooms, closets, kitchens, kid’s rooms, garages, schedules and technology. Other books on the subject tend to focus solely on tips and gloss over the psychological issues and practical challenges we all face in our efforts to conquer chaos. *Organizing from the Inside Out* goes straight to the heart of the matter and teaches you how to work with your personality rather than against it to achieve the results you are looking for. Morgenstern believes organizing is a completely learnable skill, and offers the reader a total reeducation of the organizing process.

Time Management from the Inside Out. (Second Edition) Julie Morgenstern. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2004. [Also a PBS Home Video]

Applying the groundbreaking from-the-inside-out approach that made *Organizing from the Inside Out* a New York Times bestseller, Julie Morgenstern set a new standard for the time-management category. Her system has helped countless readers uncover their psychological stumbling blocks and strengths, and develop a time-management system that suits their individual needs. By applying her proven three-step program – Analyze, Strategize, Attack – and following her effective guidelines, readers will find more time for work, family, self-improvement, or whatever is most important to them. Time management is a learnable skill, and in this completely revised edition, Morgenstern provides the ultimate tools to combine, delegate, and eliminate unnecessary tasks; put technology to work; and stop procrastinating once and for all.