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Habits for a Mother's  
Heart, Soul,  
Mind, and  
Strength





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Amy Fischer and Leah Martin

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# Contents

Introduction	1
Habits for the Heart	5
Habits for the Soul	24
Habits for the Mind	43
Habits for Strength	62
Habit Planning	80
Habit Trackers	93
Works Cited	100
About the Authors	102
More from Leah and Amy	103



# Introduction

In recent years, much has been written and said about forming positive habits to help our lives be more productive, peaceful, and enjoyable. This modern trend echoes the ideas of British educator, Charlotte Mason, whose philosophy is the focus of the Thinking Love Podcast. On the podcast, we've devoted much time to discussing habits, and we even created a habits course to help moms develop good habits in their young children.

All this begs the question: why habits? Why have habits captured the attention of so many people throughout history, right through our modern times?

While habits are sometimes presented as the ultimate life hack, a way to fast track self-improvement, we reject this idea as Christians. Our righteousness comes through Christ, not our habits. Habits, however, have a role in Christian discipleship.

In his book *You are What You Love*, James K. A. Smith discusses the spiritual side of habits. All habits, he writes, have an orientation toward a particular reward or goal. Because habits are repeated, they increase our desire for these ends. They train our affections. The question becomes: do our habits help us want the right goal?

Jesus tells us that the greatest commandment is to love God “with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” If our habits train our affections, we want our habits to train us to love God with all our being. This is the motivation behind this book: to encourage you to reflect on how your habits are shaping you and to prayerfully consider how God is calling you to practice habits that increase your love for Him with your whole self.

Habits are not a way of earning righteousness, but the blessed truth is that through God's grace, we can change. We hope this book will bring you both inspiration and a concrete action plan for developing these habits.

## Charlotte Mason Habit Formation

Charlotte Mason's first volume, *Home Education*, describes what habit formation should look like. You can find these ideas embedded in the section titled, “The Forming of a Habit– Shut the Door After You.”

1. **Inspiration.** We see that inspiration is necessary to motivate change. As we are habit training ourselves, we will first need to seek inspiration to grow. We have attempted to provide that for you in this book.
2. **Clarify expectations.** You'll need to specifically define the habit you'd like to form, and decide what it would look like to develop it.
3. **Consistency.** In order to form a new habit, consistency is required. We form habits through repetition.
4. **Celebration.** After we have developed a new habit through consistency, it's worth celebration!



In Charlotte Mason's process, it is our opinion that consistency is the most important factor in habit formation. By repeating actions, we strengthen our neural pathways around those actions. This allows that action to become more natural and automatic or, in other words, a habit!

The recent boom in habit formation research has revealed how accurate Charlotte Mason's observations were, but also how to hone in on this process a bit more.

## The Habit loop

The habit loop was made well-known through the book *The Power of Habit* by Charles Duhig. This loop fits quite nicely with Charlotte Mason's process. Through research, it was discovered that habits form in a cyclical fashion-

1. **Cue.** The habit cue is something that sets the habit in motion. If your goal is healthful eating, your habit cue will most likely be hunger. Recognizing the cue can help us be consistent in our habit formation.
2. **Routine.** This is the actual habit that you will repeat over and over again. The cue tells you to complete the routine.
3. **Reward.** In order to be successful, a reward is helpful. It could be something as simple as feeling a sense of accomplishment, or the joy of having a nicely made bed.

Pulling ideas from both modern research and Charlotte Mason, we are confident that you will be able to develop these habits that will help your homeschool and home run more smoothly.

## Using This Book

Reflecting the Great Commandment, we have divided this book into four sections: heart, soul, mind and strength. Each category has a short introduction, and then ideas for habits you might want to develop. In each section, we've included suggestions of relevant habits to help you think about what these principles might look like in action. You'll also find questions for reflection and room to write your answers.

This by no means implies that you must work on all of these habits! Choose those that will be the most helpful in your home. In order to help you specifically plan the habits you choose to work on, there are recording pages in the back of the book to help think through the habit and identify what the habit loop will look like.

You can work through this book in order, or you can flip through the pages and pick and choose where to put your focus. We hope this is a resource that you can return to time and time again.

# Habits for the Heart

After my third son was born, my other two boys (ages three and two at the time) started waking up around 5:30 in the morning, about two hours earlier than usual. They would hear the baby crying for an early morning feed, and then both come to the baby gate at their door wanting to get up for the day.

This caused problems on multiple levels. On one hand, I needed to go back to sleep after I fed the baby. On the other, my other children were tired and grouchy the rest of the day. Of course, my older children wouldn't just get back into bed, and my sleep deprived blood would boil. I felt cross and helpless, frustrated before the day even began.

This pattern went on for weeks. I couldn't seem to break the cycle of my kids' early waking. Even if the baby happened to sleep through the early morning, my older children would wake up. I was at the end of my rope, and it was at this point that I decided to get incredibly calm and patient.

Somehow this demeanor had eluded me in those early morning hours, but before bed one evening I made my decision: I would shove anger to the side and calmly and quietly get my kids back into bed.

It worked. Within a couple of days my boys were back to sleeping until 7:30. This experience cemented a principle in my mind: I'm not going to solve my parenting problems with stress, anger, and frustration.

When we first consider emotional habits, the idea seems a bit strange. After all, emotions are subjective, reactive, and largely out of our control. Do we have any choice but to feel them? And yet, at second thought, we have moments where we overcome our initial emotions and see the benefits of remaining calm and objective in tense situations and keeping our emotions from going haywire.

Building emotional habits isn't about denying our feelings, but nurturing appropriate ones. It is good to grieve with those who grieve as much as it is to cultivate gratitude and joy in all circumstances. We also need to develop the emotional strength to prevent our emotions from propelling us into unthoughtful, foolish action - like my weeks of frustration with my kids for waking up too early. Over the following sections, we invite you to consider both aspects of building God-honoring emotional habits.

*Amy*

# Perseverance

Resolve. Stick-with-it-ness. Grit. However we think of it, perseverance is the habit of staying a course and making progress toward a goal. It is a habit of continuing on in spite of hardship, obstacles, or fatigue. It is the habit that lies at the root of building any other habit, the ability to repeat, to try again, to keep going.

Motherhood and homeschooling are a marathon, not a sprint. Perseverance helps us to stay the course, even when we “hit the wall” of exhaustion, whether we are establishing boundaries with a toddler, ensuring school work gets done, or carving out the time to read, pray, and grow as persons.

To develop perseverance, then, we need to consider two things. First, are we persevering in the right direction? In open water swimming, most coaches recommend checking your direction every three breaths because it is so easy to go off course. Wise perseverance is not foolhardy, but takes the time to get her bearings often.

Second, are we going at a good pace? If our regular rhythm of life leaves us feeling breathless, we may soon find ourselves at the point of debilitating weariness. We also need to consider the opposite situation: perhaps we have the capacity to walk a little faster in order to maintain our progress.

## Habits to Inspire

- **The habit of finishing.** Charlotte Mason writes, “What is worth beginning is worth finishing, and what is worth doing is worth doing well...It is worthwhile to make ourselves go on with the thing we are doing until it is finished.” (Vol. 4)
- **The habit of trying again.** Failure is frustrating. When we miss a day on our habit tracker, or fail to check in on our habit plans, we may prefer to give up. Perseverance, though, encourages us to give it another go.
- **The habit of assessing habits.** Regularly taking time to evaluate and adjust our established habits keeps us in touch with both our orientation and pacing. Put it on your calendar and make an appointment with yourself!

## Reflect

Write down areas in life where you demonstrate perseverance and areas where you have struggled to stick with something.

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Where have you persevered; what motivation lies at the core?  
Where you have struggled; what obstacles got in the way?

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Take time to evaluate the orientation of the areas you have listed above.

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