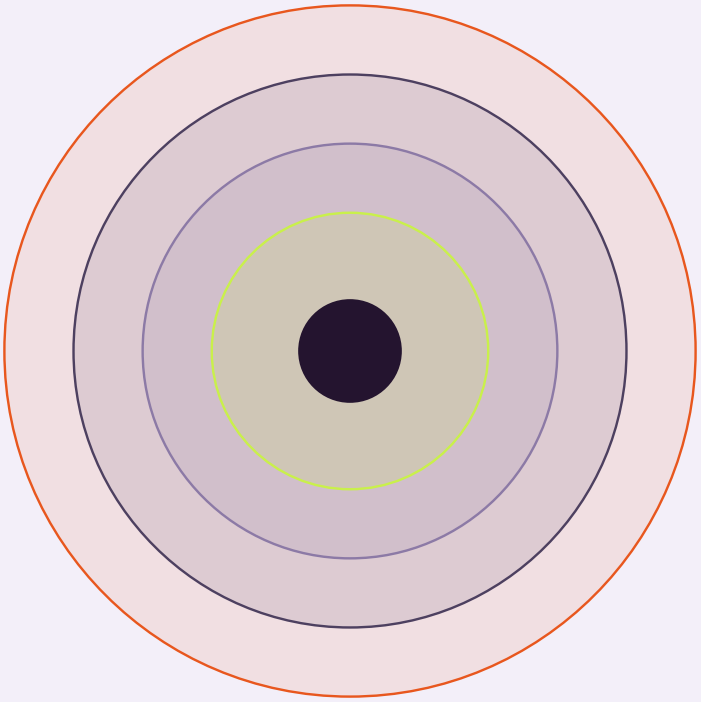


Chop Wood Carry Water

A reading of the book by Joshua Medcalf (2015)

1. ACTION BOOK

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ABOUT THIS EDITION

This is HourLife's reading of Chop Wood Carry Water, in our own words. It is not a substitute for the book.

BEFORE YOU START 01

The book in a minute

Joshua Medcalf's parable follows John and his teacher Akira as ambition meets the daily work of practicing a craft, attending to small things, and loosening identity from results.

Below are the 8 ideas HourLife readers vote up most, each in our words with a note on what it asks of you, and then the steps that put them to work.

WHAT READERS KEEP

The takeaways

1 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

The ordinary work deserves your attention.

John's training brings him back to small, repeated tasks. Read that as an invitation to notice how you do the fundamentals of your own craft.

2 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

An outcome can guide you; a practice gives you work to do.

Name what you hope for, then choose an action you can take today. Keep the distinction useful rather than treating goals and daily work as enemies.

3 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Repeated choices shape the person doing the work.

The book uses the image of building a house to connect daily practice with character. Ask what your habits are making easier to repeat.

4 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Progress may be difficult to see during a particular session.

Keep a record of the work and seek feedback over time. Patience leaves room for slow learning, while review helps you notice when the approach needs to change.

5 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Choose a manageable standard before the session begins.

Decide what careful practice will look like today. A concrete standard can help when enthusiasm varies, and it can include an appropriate amount of rest.

6 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

A setback can give you something specific to work on.

Describe what happened before judging the whole attempt. Ask what needs another repetition, a different explanation, or help from someone with more experience.

7 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Comparison can draw attention away from your next repetition.

Notice whether watching someone else teaches you something useful. If it mainly leaves you distracted, return to the part of your own work that needs attention.

8 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

One result does not describe the whole person.

A performance tells you something about an attempt under particular conditions. It can inform the next session without becoming a complete account of your worth.

PUT IT TO WORK

Your action book

Do the setup steps once, then keep the habits going. The setup changes your week; the habits keep it changed after the first good one.

The download puts this whole reading and a printable action book in one PDF: the setup checklist, then a page of real calendar days for each habit, starting on the day you choose.

SET UP ONCE

- [ ] Write a direction you can return to
- [ ] Name two fundamentals for the next session
- [ ] Describe a quality you want to practice
- [ ] Separate your actions from the result you want
- [ ] Set a visible standard for a small task

KEEP UP DAILY

- ◯ Mark only the work you actually completed
- ◯ End with one observation
- ◯ Choose a deliberate time for comparison

30 days · Nov 11 - Dec 10, 2026

Part two, after the reading, prints each of these as a page to fill in by hand.

THE LAST WORD

Before you go

Pick one step from the action book and do it today. An idea from a book starts to count once it changes what one ordinary day looks like.

PART TWO

The action book

Change the setup once, then keep it up. 5 setup actions to do once, and 3 habits to mark each day for 30 days.

Nov 11 - Dec 10, 2026

Print it, or write on it in any PDF app.

SET UP ONCE

The setup checklist

Each of these is done once. Do one a day, and check it off when it is done.

☐ SETUP 1

Write a direction you can return to

Describe the kind of contribution you want your practice to support.

Keep the sentence practical enough to guide a difficult day, and leave room to revise it as you learn.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

☐ SETUP 2

Name two fundamentals for the next session

Choose two pieces of work that support your craft.

Make each specific enough to begin: draft a scene, review a calculation, or repeat a short passage slowly.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

☐ SETUP 3

Describe a quality you want to practice

Choose one quality such as patience, care, or reliability.

Write how it would appear in the next session: checking the work, keeping a promise, or staying with a difficult passage.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

☐ SETUP 4

Separate your actions from the result you want

Use two columns.

Put the work you can do in one and the outcome you hope for in the other. Plan the next session from the first column and review results when they provide useful feedback.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

☐ SETUP 5

Set a visible standard for a small task

Choose one fundamental and define what doing it with care means today.

Make the standard observable, such as reading a paragraph aloud or checking a measurement twice.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

DAILY HABIT 1 OF 3

Mark only the work you actually completed

After a session, record which practices you did.

Nov 11 - Dec 10, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

November 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11 ○	12 ○	13 ○	14 ○	15 ○
16 ○	17 ○	18 ○	19 ○	20 ○	21 ○	22 ○
23 ○	24 ○	25 ○	26 ○	27 ○	28 ○	29 ○
30 ○						

December 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○	6 ○
7 ○	8 ○	9 ○	10 ○	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP

DAILY HABIT 2 OF 3

End with one observation

Write a sentence about what became clearer, what was difficult, or what you want to try next.

Nov 11 - Dec 10, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

November 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
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30						

December 2026

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28	29	30	31			

EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP

DAILY HABIT 3 OF 3

Choose a deliberate time for comparison

For a few sessions, keep rankings and other people's progress out of the practice itself.

Nov 11 - Dec 10, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

November 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
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December 2026

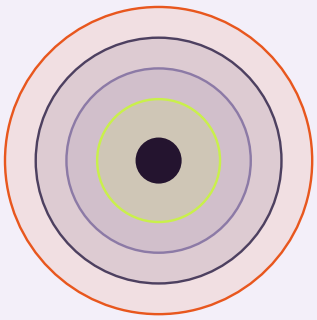
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EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP



Choose the next piece of practice. Give it your attention.

AN HOURLIFE REFLECTION ON CHOP WOOD CARRY WATER