

Developing a Rule of Life

God's desire for each of us is that we would enter into a with-God life. A life lived with-God. Centered around Christ. Growing into the image and likeness of Christ. This doesn't happen automatically or haphazardly. It requires a great deal of intentionality.

The purpose of the Rule of Life is to help regulate our entire lives in such a way that we truly prefer the love of Christ above all things.



Romans 12:1,2 : “So here’s what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—**and place it before God as an offering**. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him.” The Message

A Rule of life helps us to stay connected to God in the present moment by noticing the now - not by adding disciplines to an already busy life but by becoming conscious of God in what we are already doing. Our part is to remain available, to listen, to observe, to act, to be. This enables us to remain spiritually alive – mindful of God’s presence with us.

In her book, *Soul Feast*, Marjorie Thompson says, “A rule of life is a pattern of spiritual disciplines that provides structure and direction for growth in holiness. When we speak of *patterns* in our life, we mean attitudes, behaviors, or elements that are routine, repeated, regular. Indeed, the Latin term for ‘rule’ is *regula*, from which our words *regular* and *regulate* derive. A rule of life is not meant to be restrictive, although it certainly asks for genuine commitment. It is meant to help us establish a rhythm of daily living, a basic order within which new freedoms can grow. A rule of life, like a trellis, (The word “rule” comes from the Greek for “trellis.”) curbs our tendency to wander and supports our frail efforts to grow spiritually (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005, p. 146).”

It is not a technique or a spiritual diet but a framework that helps us step by step and in a natural way, to incorporate reminders of God’s presence into the life we already live. A Rule of Life, very simply, is an intentional, conscious plan to keep God at the center of everything we do.

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- It provides guidelines to help us continually remember God as the Source of our lives.
- It includes our unique combination of spiritual practices that provide structure and direction for us to intentionally pay attention and remember God in everything we do.

- The starting point and foundation of any Rule is a desire to be with God and to love him.

Very few people have a conscious plan for developing their spiritual lives. Most Christians are not intentional, but rather functional, like cars on autopilot. Our crammed schedules, endless to-do lists, demanding jobs and families, constant noise, information bombardment, and anxieties keep us speeding up, not slowing down. We have routines to manage other parts of our lives. For example, each morning we get up, feed the cat, then make coffee, exercise, get dressed for work, and eat breakfast...

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The reality, however, is that every person has an unconscious Rule for developing his or her spiritual life. Unconscious, but perhaps not intentional. Nurturing a growing spirituality with depth in our present-day culture will require a thoughtful, conscious, intentional plan for our spiritual lives.

What would it look like for each of us to develop a Rule of Life?

DEVELOPING A RULE OF LIFE

Though we are each unique and different, our goal is the same:

- union with God in Christ,
- transformation into his image, and
- the freeing of our hearts from anything that stands in the way of Christ living in and through us.

How we get there will vary, depending on our personality, gift mix, temperament, culture, and particular calling from God. In addition, God will have different practices and emphases at different seasons and phases of our lives. There's an infinite number of variations of what one's Rule of Life could look like. Here are a few ideas, covering several broad categories.

PRAYER

- Scripture
- Silence & Solitude
- Rhythms of Prayer
- Study

REST

- Sabbath
- Simplicity
- Play & Recreation

WORK/ACTIVITY

- Service & Mission
- Care for the Physical Body

RELATIONSHIPS

- Emotional Health
- Family
- Community (Companions for the Journey)

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Developing an intentional Rule of Life takes some trial and error. As we learn more and more about ourselves and how we've been designed to connect with God and others, our Rule of Life will take on differing shapes. It will also look different in different seasons of life and in different seasons of the calendar year.

“Your way of acting should be different from the world’s way. The love of Christ must come before all else.” -St. Benedict (A.D. 480-547)

CRAFTING A PERSONAL RULE OF LIFE

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STEP 1 Write down everything you currently do that nurtures your spirit.

These are things that connect your spiritual life with your daily life – activities where God is already present. Normally, when we think of spiritual activities, we limit ourselves to things such as prayer, worship and Bible reading. We want to encourage you to expand into new areas that bring you delight and joy. This may include such things as: outdoor recreation, exploring new places, exercise, silence and reflection, Sabbath, days alone with God, time with people you enjoy, journaling, caring for the environment. This may also include avoiding certain activities such as violent movies, hurry, and going beyond your limits.

STEP 2 Take the list and place them into the four areas – prayer, rest, work/activity, relationships.

STEP 3 Think about what other activities you are not currently doing but want to do-experiences that fill you with joy, life, energy and peace. Add these to your list in each

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category. Are there other activities that you want to stop doing because they drain you and disconnect you from God?

STEP 4 Take a step back and examine your Personal Rule of Life. What are some changes you would like to make to create a life that enables you to remain in on-going communion with God?

STEP 5 Remember:

1. Listen to your heart's desires when discerning YOUR RULE. God speaks to us through them.

2. Make sure YOUR RULE includes some joy, play and fun.

3. Take baby steps. Don't make YOUR RULE impossible to follow.

4. You're going to have trouble keeping YOUR RULE sometimes.

Recognize that you're human and try again. Unexpected things come into our lives that we can't help. We take on projects that are bigger than we expected. It takes experimentation to discern what form YOUR RULE should take.

5. Figure out how much structure you need – a lot or a little.

Debra Farrington in her book, *Living Faith Day by Day* writes,

“Over the years I've also struggled with the amount of structure to build into a rule. People I respect deeply have detailed rules with set times for prayer, established types of prayer and so on. They tell me that if they don't get up at 6:30 each morning and take a half hour of prayer time that they will never get to it during the day. But that doesn't work for me. It makes my spiritual life into something to add to my to-do list, and it becomes a chore and not a blessing. Over the years I have found that my rule for prayer needs to be more open-ended. I am committed to praying daily, but how and when I do that varies from day-to-day.”

Again, remember the goal as you enter this journey of utilizing this powerful tool called “A Rule of Life” – is to receive the love of God and to offer His love to those around you