

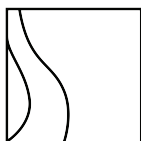
INSTITUTE

Rule of Life

WHAT IS A RULE OF LIFE?

A rule of life is a set of practices or routines, a schedule, so to speak, that helps us open up space in our often busy lives to be with Jesus, become like Jesus and do what Jesus did. In addition, it helps us to live in alignment with our deepest passions and priorities.

While the word “rule” may strike you as a strict or binding constraint, the Latin word we translate “rule” was originally the word for a trellis in a vineyard. In the same way a vine needs a trellis to lift it off the ground so it can bear the maximum amount of fruit, and keep free of predators and diseases, we need a rule as a kind of support structure to organize our life around “abiding in the vine,” (John 15:1–8) as Jesus imagined. It’s been said that we achieve inner peace when our schedule is aligned with our values. A rule of life is simply a tool to that end. Rather than a rigid, legalistic to-do list, it’s a life-giving structure for freedom, growth, and joy.



“A GOOD RULE CAN SET US FREE TO BE OUR TRUE AND BEST SELVES. IT IS A WORKING DOCUMENT, A KIND OF SPIRITUAL BUDGET, NOT CARVED IN STONE BUT SUBJECT TO A REGULAR REVIEW AND REVISION. IT SHOULD SUPPORT US, BUT NEVER CONSTRICT US.”

Margaret Guenther
Wife, Mother, & Anglican Priest

“I CANNOT TRANSFORM MYSELF, OR ANYONE ELSE FOR THAT MATTER. WHAT I CAN DO IS CREATE THE CONDITIONS IN WHICH SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION CAN TAKE PLACE, BY DEVELOPING AND MAINTAINING A RHYTHM OF SPIRITUAL PRACTICES THAT KEEP ME OPEN AND AVAILABLE TO GOD.”

Ruth Haley Barton
Author, Teacher, Founder of The Transforming Center

HOW TO USE THIS WORKBOOK

This workbook is adapted from a resource created by Bridgetown Church in Portland Oregon and was designed as a simple guide for you to develop a personal rule of life, not a one-size fits all list of “rules” to follow. Please adapt, change, and improvise as seems best to you and your community.

Here are five easy steps.

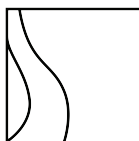
STEP 1: Look over the Rule of Life Chart and spend a little time contemplating it, considering how it relates to different areas of your life.

STEP 2: On the following pages, prayerfully work through each life category one at a time, giving yourself a little time to list out your current practices, and to imagine what a more intentional rule of life could look like for you in this season.

STEP 3: As we journey through the next eight weeks together, learning about seven core practices of Jesus and the early church, give yourself fully to engaging in each practice. Make sure to keep in mind your season and stage of life in addition to the idea that one of the first dynamics of holistic spiritual formation will be “confrontation” as Mulholland says. While we will focus together on seven specific practices, we will also consider other practices and we will design our rule through the lens of the “life categories” listed in the workbook. Throughout the class, come back to your rule of life chart and use it as a tool to imagine what it might look like to make space for the seven core practices at a minimum. Think in terms of the next six to twelve months of your life and remember that this is a working document.

STEP 4: Treat these next eight weeks as an experiment and opportunity to live into your rule of life one step at a time. Feelings and emotions can be a window into hearing from the Lord so pay attention to these. Where is your rule of life feeling burdensome or boring rather than “confrontational” and why? Notice this without judgment, and consider what you need to change. What’s working and what’s not working? What’s bringing you life? What’s draining you? Talk about this in class, with a partner, a close friend, or a mentor or community member.

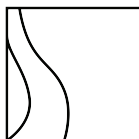
STEP 5: Continue to review your rule in October and November in preparation for our last class period where you will present your rule of life for 2023 and commit to walking in it. You will continue to adjust your rule moving forward. The goal is to commit to living into your rule over an extended period of time (6-12 months) as you adjust with the help of the Spirit. Over that time period, create space for reflection via journaling, talking to a friend, or just taking a walk and thinking about it, to see what effect a life organized around “training as an apprentice of the way” is doing for your transformation into a person of love, joy, and peace in the kingdom of God.



LIFE CATEGORIES

Contrary to popular usage, in biblical theology, your “soul” (hebrew: nephesh) isn’t the invisible part of you that flies off to heaven when you die. Rather, “soul” is your whole person: the integrating center of your humanity, material and immaterial. Your will, mind, emotions, body, and relationships.

The following categories are an attempt to apply a rule of life to your whole person, so that “all of us” can experience “all of God.”



THE SEVEN CORE PRACTICES OF PRACTICING THE WAY

Every church tradition and generation emphasizes its own rule of life, even if they don't use that language. There are seven spiritual disciplines we think are core to following Jesus in our place and time. As core Practices to following Jesus, these seven Practices are likely to appear several times in your rule of life (for example, Silence & Solitude may be essential to both abiding and mind). Include these Practices wherever they make the most sense in your personal rule of life.

Here are some questions to consider: Which of these Practices are currently part of your life? Is there a Practice or Practices that you are not currently participating in but that stand out to you? Are there any Practices you feel strongly opposed to and if so, can you name why?

SILENCE & SOLITUDE

A moment of intentional time in the quiet to be alone with God.

SCRIPTURE

Continually committing to studying and placing yourself under the word of God.

PRAYER

Central to life with God, woven into the fabric of our routines.

FASTING

A willing abstinence from food for a period of time.

SIMPLICITY

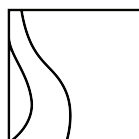
Structuring your life in such a way that it becomes more freeing.

LIVING IN COMMUNITY

Partners for the journey, to share life and the Lord's Supper.

SABBATH

A day set aside for rest and worship, including church on Sundays.



RULE OF LIFE CHART

PRACTICES	ABIDE	MIND	BODY	RELATIONSHIPS	REST	WORK & MONEY	GOSPEL & HOSPITALITY
DAILY							
WEEKLY							
MONTHLY							
QUARTERLY							
ANNUALLY							

Abide

Through Practices (also known as spiritual disciplines, kingdom habits or sacred rhythms) from the life and teachings of Jesus, we create space in our life for the Spirit and truth of God to transform us into people of love, not by “trying really hard, but by training really hard.”

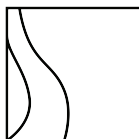
What Practices do you utilize to “abide in the vine”, turn your attention to God all through your day, and index your heart’s affection toward receiving and giving His love?

EXAMPLES: morning prayer, Scripture reading, worship music, the daily office, the prayer of examen, sabbath, fasting, silence and solitude, retreat, etc.

RECOMMENDED BASELINE PRACTICE: Commit to daily quiet time away from your phone (ideally upon waking), a weekly sabbath, and church on Sunday.

IF YOU’RE NEW TO THIS PRACTICE, we recommend you start with ten minutes a day, ideally upon waking, to sit silently with God (light a candle, listen to a piece of music, read a Psalm such as Psalm 23 or just be silent with Jesus) and notice God’s “withness” in addition to gathering with your church on Sunday.

QUESTIONS: What practices make up your current rule of life (official or unofficial)? What practices would you like to add in, cut out, or change?



Mind

What we give our attention to is the person we become. Through what scientists call neuroplasticity and Paul calls “the renewal of the mind” (Romans 12v2), we have a say in the kind of thought life we wire into our brain, and as a result, the kind of people we are being formed into — whether it’s formation through the truth of God, or deformation through social media, news feeds, and entertainment queues.

How are you curating your thought life to take on “the mind of Christ” (Philippians 2v5-8)? And how are you carefully guarding your mind’s time and input from digital devices to keep it healthy, free of temptation and distraction, and set on God’s loving, joyful companionship through your days and weeks?

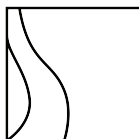
EXAMPLES: Reading Scripture in the morning, regular podcasts or book reading, church on Sunday, gratitude, a digital rule of life, “parenting your phone,” digital sabbath, a daily limit on device use, etc.

RECOMMENDED BASELINE PRACTICE: Commit to disengage from screens on a daily, weekly, and annual basis, set a time limit on your use of entertainment, and an established expectation of moral quality in what you take in.

Commit also to the regular intake of truth and teaching through your medium of choice — reading, podcasting, Bible study, or even digital spaces if done the right way etc. and the daily habit of gratitude and hope.

IF YOU’RE NEW TO THIS PRACTICE, we recommend you begin your day by reading the New Testament, before turning on your phone, even if only for a few minutes a day.

QUESTIONS: What practices make up your current rule of life (official or unofficial)? What practices would you like to add in, cut out, or change?



Body

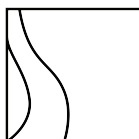
We are whole people. Mind and body. Immaterial and material. A holistic, embodied spirituality is key to the way of Jesus. Yet in a day and age of body-image obsession and sexual idolatry, many of us “react into” the opposite extreme which is a kind of neo-gnostic spirituality that sees the body as no more than a container to carry “us” around until we die. In this view, sexuality becomes just an animal release impulse for pleasure, not the fusion of two souls in the self-giving love of a covenant relationship. But Paul calls followers of Jesus to “offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God.” What habits of body do you utilize to keep your whole person healthy and “holy” (whole) before God?

EXAMPLES: sleep, regular exercise, a healthy diet, water, limiting alcohol intake, walking, rising at a certain time daily, activity in sports, annual doctor’s visit, vitamins, and honoring God with your sexuality by living by Jesus’ teachings.

RECOMMENDED BASELINE PRACTICE: Commit to sleep a minimum of seven hours a night, get some form of exercise on a regular basis (as you are able), and eat well.

IF YOU’RE NEW TO THIS PRACTICE, we recommend you start with going to bed earlier than you usually do, and taking a short walk each day.

QUESTIONS: What practices make up your current rule of life (official or unofficial)? What practices would you like to add in, cut out, or change?



Relationships

We are relational beings, created by a relational God for relationship. What relationships form our community before God? Who do we walk the way of Jesus alongside? And what are we doing to create, nurture, and deepen relationships of vulnerability and accountability? You may find it helpful to think through the categories of friendship, church, marriage, and family.

EXAMPLES FOR FRIENDSHIP: weekly phone call or coffee with a good friend, regular times to connect over a meal, etc.

EXAMPLES FOR CHURCH: weekly meal with community, church on Sunday, regular parties, serving together, pursuing relationships across lines of class and ethnicity, etc.

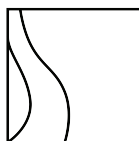
EXAMPLES FOR MARRIAGE: a fifteen-minute touchpoint per day, weekly date night, cultivating healthy sexual connection, regular getaways, etc.

EXAMPLES FOR FAMILY: sitting down to dinner three nights a week, sabbath, a weekly daddy-daughter or mom-son date, annual vacation, family movie night or Saturday soccer match, etc.

RECOMMENDED BASELINE PRACTICE: commit to a weekly meal with your community and some daily and weekly touchpoints with your spouse and children or other family members, and/or closest friends.

IF YOU'RE NEW TO THIS PRACTICE, we recommend you start with a weekly get together with a close friend to connect at a soul level.

QUESTIONS: What practices make up your current rule of life (official or unofficial)? What practices would you like to add in, cut out, or change?



Rest

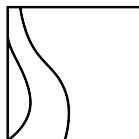
Rest is essential to our spiritual formation. It's very hard to tempt well-rested, healthy, happy people. Even more, when we're well rested, love comes easily out of our inner being. From page two of the Bible (the sabbath story) onward, rest is an essential component to living well in God's world. What practices and rhythms of rest are built into your life?

EXAMPLES: morning quiet time, sleeping eight hours most nights, a weekly sabbath, a "nothing night" once a week, etc.

RECOMMENDED BASELINE PRACTICE: commit to a daily quiet time and a weekly sabbath.

IF YOU'RE NEW TO THIS PRACTICE, we recommend you start with a few hours on your day off to just relax and connect with God.

QUESTIONS: What practices make up your current rule of life (official or unofficial)? What practices would you like to add in, cut out, or change?



Work & Money

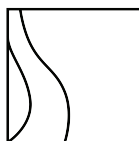
When God created humans, he set them in a Garden to “work it and take care of it” (Genesis 2). Built into our humanity is the call of God to make our world more like Eden. What we do with our resources—time, money, gifting and capacity—matters to God (and to others). At its best, work is an expression of love and justice. At its worst, of ambition and greed. Our work often generates money; how we steward those resources is key to our apprenticeship to Jesus. A life of simplicity and generosity is a core tenant in Jesus’ vision of life in the kingdom. What habits have you built into your work life and financial life to make stewarding your work and money part of your life before God?

EXAMPLES: times of “deep work” each week, a fixed hour schedule, dedicated time to an entrepreneurial project, tithing, a blessing fund, sponsoring a child, etc.

RECOMMENDED BASELINE PRACTICE: commit to spend several hours each day devoted to your most important work, and to give away a minimum of ten percent of your gross income (tithing), with special attention to the church and the poor.

IF YOU’RE NEW TO THIS PRACTICE, we recommend you start with setting aside a percentage of your income to give away, even if it’s just 1–2%, and doing a weekly act of love through your work.

QUESTIONS: What practices make up your current rule of life (official or unofficial)? What practices would you like to add in, cut out, or change?



Gospel & Hospitality

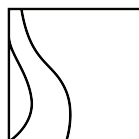
Jesus left us with a mandate to “go into all the world and preach the gospel”; a gospel that he himself brought in both word and deed. While he was among us, he regularly welcomed people from all walks of life to the table for a meal. There’s a long-standing tradition from the way of Jesus that sees hospitality not only as an expression of love, but as the best way to invite people to both hear and experience the gospel of God’s love in action. What rhythms of hospitality and gospel have you worked into your life?

EXAMPLES: asking a friend to come to a gathering at the church (eg. faith and culture forum, fall festival, Sunday morning gathering etc), a regular night to host neighbors for dinner, spending time listening to co-workers, serving the poor through volunteering, etc.

RECOMMENDED BASELINE PRACTICE: commit to invite a friend who doesn’t follow Jesus over for dinner once a month, and to a gathering on our campus 1–2 times a year.

IF YOU’RE NEW TO THIS PRACTICE, we recommend you start with one meal with a friend or neighbor who isn’t yet a follower of Jesus.

QUESTIONS: What practices make up your current rule of life (official or unofficial)?
What practices would you like to add in, cut out, or change?



“IF THOSE IN THE CHURCHES REALLY ARE ENJOYING THE FULLNESS OF LIFE (JOHN 10 V10), EVANGELISM WILL BE UNSTOPPABLE AND LARGELY AUTOMATIC. THE LOCAL CHURCH FOR ITS PART CAN THEN BECOME AN ACADEMY WHERE PEOPLE THROG FROM THE SURROUNDING COMMUNITY TO LEARN HOW TO LIVE. IT WILL BE A SCHOOL OF LIFE. FOR A DISCIPLE IS BUT A STUDENT WHERE ALL ASPECTS OF THAT LIFE SEEN IN THE NEW TESTAMENT RECORDS ARE PRACTICED AND MASTERED UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF THOSE WHO THEMSELVES MASTERED THEM THROUGH PRACTICE. ONLY BY TAKING THIS AS OUR IMMEDIATE GOAL CAN WE INTEND TO CARRY OUT THE GREAT COMMISSION.”

Dallas Willard
Spirit of the Disciplines

“WE ARE, THEREFORE, ABOUT TO FOUND A SCHOOL OF THE LORD’S SERVICE, IN WHICH WE HOPE TO INTRODUCE NOTHING HARSH OR BURDENSOME. THE GOOD OF ALL CONCERNED, HOWEVER, MAY PROMPT US TO A LITTLE STRICTNESS IN ORDER TO AMEND FAULTS AND TO SAFEGUARD LOVE. DO NOT BE DAUNTED IMMEDIATELY BY FEAR AND RUN AWAY FROM THE ROAD THAT LEADS TO SALVATION. IT IS BOUND TO BE NARROW AT THE OUTSET. AND AS WE GO FORWARD IN OUR LIFE AND FAITH, OUR HEARTS WILL EXPAND AND WE WILL RUN THE WAY OF GOD’S COMMANDMENTS WITH UNSPEAKABLE SWEETNESS OF LOVE.”

The Rule of Benedict
Prologue