



“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 regular review and revision. It should support us, but never constrict us.”

Margaret Guenther

“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. Don’t become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You’ll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.”

Romans 12:1-2, The Message

Fix your attention on God, Paul says, and you’ll be changed from the inside out. For most of us, the concept isn’t difficult; the execution is. How do we fix our attention on God in the midst of our distracted, often interrupted, and incredibly busy 21st century lives? Is it possible for inside out transformation to happen when I’m carrying an iPhone? Can it be done with kids? *My kids?* What about when I’m working two jobs to make ends meet? Or when my schedule is overbooked for something like the next decade? How do I fix my attention on *God* of all things?

The answer to this very modern problem (which is actually a timeless problem, but we can pretend it’s modern for the sake of our chronological snobbery) is actually a very ancient practice. Around 450 A.D. a monk named Benedict developed the “Little Rule for Beginners” to which we trace the concept of a “Rule of Life.” Stephen Macchia defines a rule of life this way: “A holistic description of the Spirit-empowered rhythms and relationships that create, redeem, sustain and transform the life God invites you to humbly fulfill for Christ’s glory.”

The word “rule” might have negative connotations for you, sounding like it’s binding or restraining. The Latin word translated “rule” is *regula* and it literally means “railing” or “guidepost.” It’s something that you hang

onto in the dark. The rule of life, therefore, is a set of rhythms and practices that help us to grow to be like Jesus amid a dark world. The most common metaphor is that of a trellis—a necessary structure that enables the vine to bear fruit. It’s been said that inner peace comes when our schedule is aligned with our values. That’s the goal of a rule of life.

The specific exercises in this booklet will stretch over the next seven weeks and will tie directly to the teachings from Sunday morning. You can find the teachings at www.yorkalliance.org/sermons. We believe that it is impossible to gain the life of Jesus without practicing the lifestyle of Jesus, and Jesus intentionally chose to live in community. Therefore, there are both individual and communal exercises in this guidebook. If you don’t currently have a connection to a Community Group or another committed community of believers with whom to engage this material, you are strongly encouraged to get connected to one. You can get more information and sign up for a Community Group at yorkalliance.org.

I have tried to cite specific ideas and quotations where appropriate. Beyond those citations, these exercises have been developed in reliance on several sources: God in My Everything by Ken Shigematsu, Crafting a Rule of Life by Stephen Macchia, The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry by John Mark Comer, Soul Keeping by John Ortberg, The Common Rule by Justin Whitmel Earley, A Testament of Devotion by Thomas R. Kelly, and the “Rule of Life” practice on www.practicingtheway.org. Each of these are excellent and worthy of a deeper dive.

The weeks and practices will be laid out as follows:

- Week One: Curating Desires
- Week Two: Developing a Rule
- Week Three: Unhurrying in a Digital World
- Week Four: The Need for Quiet
- Week Five: The Gift of Limits
- Week Six: The Place of Lament
- Week Seven: Joy, the Missing Fruit

In addition to these seven weeks, this guide also contains a simple framework to help you develop your own rule of life and a path towards living it out.

Week One: Curating Desires

“If you are what you love, and love is a habit, then discipleship is a rehabilitation of your loves. This means discipleship is more a matter of reformation than of acquiring information. Discipleship, we might say, is a way to curate your heart to be intentional and attentive about what you love.”

James K.A. Smith, You Are What You Love

“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Jesus of Nazareth, Matthew 6:21

The words of Jesus from Matthew 6 might just be the most underutilized principle in spiritual formation. Most of us have quickly read Jesus' words to say that our checkbook (or credit card statement) reflects our loves. And while that's true, Jesus is actually saying something much more profound. If Jesus was intending to say that our spending reflected our heart, He would have said “Where your *heart* is, there your *treasure* will be also.” A true statement about the human condition. But that's not what He said. Instead, He reversed it: “Where your *treasure* is, your *heart* is certain to follow.” Or made a bit simpler: You and I are completely in control of what we love. We simply need to treasure those things.

At the heart of the Rule of Life practice is the concept of “curating our desires” or arranging our lives so that what we want to love becomes what we actually love. But that starts with recognizing areas in which we've cultivated a love that is directed toward something false or unworthy. Biblically, that's called idolatry, and uncovering it is key to developing an effective rule of life.

Practice in Community

Have somebody read Matthew 6:18-23 and Proverbs 4:23. Discuss the following questions:

- What jumps out to you in this passage?
- Based on Jesus' teaching, why is it so important to guard your heart as the Proverb suggests?
- What are some of the areas where you've placed your treasure, and how has that translated to your heart/loves?

This practice can come either before or after your individual practice—one will certainly fuel the other. Divide into groups of 3-4 people (mixing singles and couples where possible) and discuss the following:

- What are some areas of my life where I feel a disproportionate attachment? For instance: What area, when threatened or challenged, leads to a stronger reaction than it should? What portion of my life do I “guard” from a time/energy/resource perspective in a way that is disproportionate to its actual importance? Consider:
 - Technology rhythms
 - Alone/quiet time
 - Eating/drinking habits
 - Connection with friends (virtual or in person)
- Recognizing those disproportionate attachments, can you identify the idols that they point towards? Tim Keller lists the following four idols as “source” idols from which others tend to emerge: Power, Approval, Comfort, and Control.

Questions for Community:

- Is it difficult for you to uncover and name these areas? Why or why not?
- As you think about developing a Rule of Life, how do you feel about it? Why is that?

Individual Practice

Take some quiet time this week (probably at least 30-45 minutes, but possibly more) to consider the areas that are potentially idols in your life. Your goal is not to make a “hit list” that must be eliminated, but rather to uncover any area that is possibly disordered could potentially be an idol. As you make that list, think about rhythms in your life that might lead to your heart being tied to these areas. You will inspect your rhythms and habits more fully next week—your goal for now is simply to see how your repeated activity and thought patterns lead to loves in your life.

Choose ONE of these areas to experiment with for the rest of the week. Change your rhythm, replacing it with something different, and evaluate the way it impacts what you love.

Week Two: Developing a Rule

“Like a trellis, a rule of life supports and guides our growth. It supports our friendship with Christ so that we bear the fruit of His character and are able to offer His nourishing life to others. The purpose of the rule, in this sense, is not to be harsh or confining. It is to cultivate fruit.”

Ken Shigematsu, God in my Everything

“Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me... Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”

Jesus of Nazareth, John 15:4-5

Dallas Willard, in a conversation with John Ortberg, once called hurry “the great enemy of spiritual life in our day.” You might be tempted to push back: Secularism, materialism, the loss of a moral compass, etc. all might make your list, and it’s quite likely that hurry wouldn’t even make the top ten. (Or maybe Top 100!) And yet, consider that apprentices of Jesus are called to be ministers of reconciliation and ambassadors for Christ (2 Corinthians 5:18-20), and that the work of reconciliation is the plan that God has for the entirety of creation. (Ephesians 1:10, Colossians 1:20) From that perspective, it’s easy to see how endless notifications on our phones and yet another children’s activity could get in the way of the spiritual life to which we’ve been called.

Our goal over the next weeks is to work at slowing down, ordering our days, and making space to experience God as well as healthy relationship with ourselves and others. This will ultimately result in an individual “rule of life.” The goal of our individual rule of life is to help each of us, as individuals, live in such a way that we experience what Jesus called “life to the full” (John 10:10) in alignment with our deep passions and the priorities of the Kingdom of God. It will likely take longer than the length of this practice to develop a good starting place for your rule, which is why the development of the rule is listed as a separate practice at the back of this guide. The practices from these seven weeks are intended to till the soil so that, when the trellis is erected, the vine can grow freely and produce abundant fruit in our lives.

Practice in Community

Have somebody read John 15:1-17. Discuss the following questions:

- What one key idea jumps out to you in this passage?
- When have you experienced the truth that abiding in Jesus bears fruit, but apart from Him you can nothing?
- What is the greatest barrier to abiding in Christ for you?

As you discuss the barriers to abiding as a group (if your group is large, it might be helpful to break into smaller groups), brainstorm ways in which those barriers could be broken down. The goal is not to “fix” someone else, but rather, to help people think creatively about their schedules and situations. Often we can get stuck in patterns, and it’s helpful to have others within our community suggest things that could “unstick” us.

If time, take a few minutes to look at the seven aspects to the rule of life listed in the back of the guidebook. (Abiding, Mind, Body, etc.) Discuss each of these briefly—what they are, and how they might work in life.

Questions for Community:

- Does a rule of life seem freeing or constricting to you? Why?
- Which of the seven aspects excite you? Which feel difficult to you at this point? Why is that?

Individual Practice

The goal for this week is to inventory your current rhythms. At this stage this is an “amoral” activity not intended to produce judgment, but simply to produce awareness.

Make a list of every daily activity that you can think of—morning and evening routines, and everything in between. Nothing is too mundane! List brushing your teeth and checking your phone. Then, list weekly rhythms that are consistent for you: from church attendance to laundry. Finally, look at monthly, quarterly, and annual rhythms. Be as honest as you can be without being legalistic. If you do something 10 months a year, that’s monthly. If you intend to do something every quarter but it only happens once or twice a year, that’s annual.

As this practice continues, you will evaluate these rhythms. For now, just do your best to identify them and be aware of them.

Week Three: Unhurrying in a Digital World

“Our phones—and their programmers—are happy to set our habits for us. They would love to speak the first words of the day, and they usually do. Our phones—and whatever has come through them—thus shape the first desires of the morning and order our first prayers for us.”

Justin Whitmel Earley, The Common Rule

“The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance. I bless the Lord who gives me counsel; in the night also my heart instructs me. I have set the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken.”

King David, Psalms 16:6-8

There is almost universal agreement among psychologists, sociologists, and pretty much anyone paying attention that for every leap forward in technology, we pay a cost as humans. The digital revolution that began around the turn of the millennium and jumped forward in 2007 with the invention of the iPhone has exacted a cost that we have yet to measure. Neil Postman in his book “Technopoly” observed:

“(Technology) must never be accepted as part of the natural order of things... Every technology is a product of a particular economic and political context and carries with it a program, an agenda, and a philosophy that may or may not be life-enhancing and that therefore requires scrutiny, criticism, and control.”

Or, as Chris Martin in his powerful new book Terms of Service points out, when it comes to technology, we are not the customers. We’re the product.

It’s not that we need to return to some mythical, pre-digital utopia that eliminates all forms of technology. However, having eyes wide open to the negatives of the digital age and establishing a rule that sets our own habits rather than allowing them to be set by Silicon Valley is of the utmost importance. Paul declared, “I will not be mastered by anything” (1 Corinthians 6:12), and that must be our mantra as well as we navigate the world of digital addiction.

Practice in Community

Have someone read Psalm 16. Discuss the following questions:

- How do David’s words in Psalm 16 speak into the idea of a digital rule of life? Where does technology threaten to take the place of the voice of God in your life, or in the lives of others?
- Would people who know you best say that you spend a lot of time on your phone, on social media, or watching shows—in front of screens? Why would they?
- In what ways is technology potentially good? In what ways might it be detrimental? How might you navigate those realities?

Break into same gender pairs (trios if needed) and talk through some of the pitfalls of technology in your lives. Consider everything from morality to escapism to the cost of being constantly “on.” What are some strategies that you might use to offset some of these pitfalls? (See below for some suggestions.) Make a list for reference in the individual practice.

Questions for Community:

- How do you feel about engaging your digital life and creating a rule? Eager? Willing? Skeptical? Anxious?
- How might a digital rule impact your family, and would it be helpful for family to have a rule that you all follow?

Individual Practice

The goal for this week is to establish a digital rule of life, which will act as a subset of your larger rule. Set aside 30-60 minutes two or three times this week. Turn off all devices and write your thoughts with actual pen and paper. Consider what technology “demands” your time and attention and think about what you might do to change that. Develop clear and measurable rules. (Not “spend less time on Instagram” but “spend no more than 15 minutes a day on Instagram.”) Consider:

- Powering off your phone for an hour each day.
- Not keeping your phone in your bedroom and not accessing it for the first hour of the day and the last hour before bed.
- Establish “no device” zones like the dinner table or the car.
- Restrict access to certain devices, apps, or media.

This rule will certainly take some trial and error but you’re encouraged to develop an initial rule that you can begin following this week.

Week Four: The Need for Quiet

“Without solitude it is virtually impossible to live a spiritual life... We do not take the spiritual life seriously if we do not set aside some time to be with God and listen to him.”

Henri Nouwen

*“And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, [Jesus] departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed.”
“Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while.”*

Mark 1:35, 6:31

All relationships are built with the same currency: time and undivided attention. No matter what the relationship, it’s impossible for it to grow and thrive without chunks of uninterrupted time together. Collin Mayjack observes, “That is why, for many of us, friendships are easier to keep when we’re young and have few obligations.” As we get older and recognize our need for deep relationships, we intuitively recognize for those relationships to thrive, they must be scheduled: a weekly date night, a regular walk with a friend, a weekly connection with your Community Group, or even an annual vacation with friends or family.

Unfortunately, many of us fail to practice those intuitive relational truths in our connection with God. Our times with God are too often haphazard, interrupted, and distracted. That is why silence and solitude is among the most important spiritual practices—consistent time with God acts as a space where all of the other practices can flourish. But making that kind of time in a consistent and non-distracted way will require effort.

Practice in Community

Have someone read Mark 1:9-15 and 32-39. Discuss the following questions:

- What strikes you in these passages?
- What are some ways that you have prioritized this kind of time away to be with God in your life?
- What are the barriers to scheduling and experiencing this kind of time for you at this stage of your life?

Get into groups of 3-4 and consider the following questions. (taken from practicingtheway.org) Take notes about your answers, as well as others, so that you can process them later this week:

- How do you respond to time alone? What about silence?
- What does the rhythm for silence and solitude look like in your life right now, if you have one? What gets in the way of that rhythm?
- What other practices have you adopted, presently or in the past, to facilitate life with God? Which were “upstream” (challenging, but good for you) and which were “downstream” (easy for you and your personality)?
- What practices for abiding would you like to add into your life, cut out of your life, or change?

Questions for Community:

- What is one small change that you’d like to make this week in your scheduled connection with God?
- What are some ways that your approach to solitude and silence has changed in different phases of life?

Individual Practice

It seems counterintuitive to take some time in solitude and silence to plan for solitude and silence, but that’s exactly what’s needed. Take at least 30 minutes of quiet time this week to consider:

- What time of day and what space works best for you to spend time alone with God? Set a modest goal and try to stick to it.
- What activities work best for you during this time? (Scripture reading, meditation, prayer, daily office, silence, etc.)
- Develop a quantifiable daily goal for yourself and begin to practice it. You might also consider a weekly goal that’s different (15 minutes of silence daily, but an hour on Sunday mornings) as well as different activities weekly/monthly.

Consider ways to capture extra time (silence and prayer while driving, for instance) as well as special times alone with God (such as spending an hour with God alone in nature or taking a 24-48 hour silent retreat). For suggestions and practices for both prayer and silence and solitude, you can find the practice guides at www.yorkalliance.org/study-guides.

Week Five: The Gift of Limits

“The solution to an overbusy life is not more time. It’s to slow down and simplify our life around what really matters. One of the key tasks of our apprenticeship to Jesus is living into both our potential and our limitations. I have good news for you. Great news, in fact. You. Can’t. Do. It. All.”

John Mark Comer, The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry

“I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do.”

Jesus of Nazareth at age 33, John 17:4

Anne Lamott in her book Operating Instructions points out something very important for us to hear: “‘No’ is a complete sentence.”

Not that I’m good at saying it. I talk for a living, write a bit on the side, and generally spend most of my life with words. And yet, that’s a really difficult sentence for me. But the truth is, God never intended for us to be infinite. In fact, we’re quite purposely finite. We’re created to need sleep, operate within 24-hour days, have finite skills and abilities, and only roughly 80 years of life on planet Earth. The very definition of our lives is one of limitation.

When developing a rule of life, many of us look at our lives and see so many missed opportunities in practices that we could add. But one of the key aspects of apprenticeship to Jesus is to look at our lives consciously and intentionally and practice the discipline of editing. We need to learn, as Anne Lamott said, that “No” is a complete sentence.

Practice in Community

Have somebody read Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 and John 17:4. Discuss the following questions:

- How well do you maintain margin in your life? Is it getting better or worse? Why do you think that is?
- Do you feel like you have time to accomplish the “work that [God] gave [you] to do?” Why or why not?

Richard Swenson in his book Margin talks about many different kinds of overload. From the list below, which of these forms feel the most relevant to you right now?

- Activity overload
- Change overload
- Choice overload
- Commitment overload
- Debt overload
- Expectation overload
- Information overload
- Media overload
- Noise overload
- Fatigue overload

Guide the group through the following prayer exercise. Close your eyes and spend a minute or two in silence, calling to mind some kind of image that represents the limit that you are struggling to accept. Now, imagine Jesus walking up to you. Slowly imagine yourself handing Him that object, and with it, your finiteness in that area. How does He respond? Take some time in silence imagining His response.

Questions for Community:

- If you are comfortable sharing, what was that experience like for you? How did Jesus respond?
- What might help you maintain margin in your life? What are some of the hard “editing” decisions that you need to wrestle with?

Individual Practice

You now have many of the component parts to really begin working on your rule of life. Take some time this week to review the seven aspects of the rule of life, using the appendix in the back, as well as the three goals. Jot down some thoughts in answer to the following questions:

- What current habits in your life are moving you toward the goals of being with, becoming like, and doing what Jesus does?
- What current habits and rhythms are getting in the way?
- What is one daily rhythm that you’re excited about adding?
- What is one weekly rhythm that you know you need to add?
- What are some things that you need to consider eliminating or limiting as you develop a healthy rule of life?

Week Six: The Place of Lament

*“Grant me, O Lord, an acquaintance with such tears that the world has wept. Surely the presence of such a great grief in my life would displace my small sadnesses, my petty anger, my selfish sorrows. O red-eyed Jesus, turn my tears into the world’s tears. And awaken in the deepest part of my falsely satisfied soul
One Vast Loud ‘EKAH’”*

Michael Card, *A Sacred Sorrow*

“Ekah” is the Hebrew title for the book of Lamentations and means “how.”

“Why do you forget us forever, why do you forsake us for so many days? Restore us to yourself, O Lord, that we may be restored! Renew our days as of old—unless you have utterly rejected us, and you remain exceedingly angry with us.”

Jeremiah, Lamentations 5:20-22

Despite our theological knowledge of the omniscience of God, we still struggle to come before Him with complete honesty. One of the many reasons that we fail to “fix our attention on God and be changed from the inside out” (Romans 12:1-2) is that we struggle to see God in all of life. Namely, those aspects of life worthy of lament.

However, the Scripture writers had no such concern. Roughly 42 of the 150 psalms are grounded in lament, with 30 of them being personal lament and the other 12 being corporate lament. There’s an entire book of the Bible (Lamentations) dedicated to lament. Biblical figures such as Isaiah, Ezra, Daniel, Amos, Matthew, Paul, and even the trinitarian God Himself (both the Father and the Son lament actively, and the Spirit is spoken of as being grieved) lament in the Scriptures.

Lament should be a key aspect of our life with God, and therefore, should have a place in our rule of life. Creating space in which we can express sorrow and pain to God personally is important for our own spiritual development. Beyond that, if we are to become like Jesus and do the things that He did, the broader state of brokenness in the world should lead us to lament. The “great grief” that Card spoke of above should animate our prayers as we engage with God for the sake of the world.

Practice in Community

Have somebody read Lamentations 5. Discuss the following questions:

- What jumps out to you in this chapter?
- Does the seemingly negative tone of this type of passage make you uncomfortable? Why?

Take some time as a group to lament. It often works best to start with personal sadnesses, seeking to get underneath the event to the heart of what you are truly lamenting. As you share those with one another, allow your personal lament to give way to a broader lament for the sake of the world around you. Consider some of the deep brokenness that is prevalent around the globe, and in our own communities. Don’t just rush past it—allow the weight of the brokenness to land on you.

At some point, as you sense the Spirit leading you, transition to a time of bringing your laments before God. Work to avoid “proper” and “religious” language as you seek to be completely honest before God. Give space for yelling, frustration, and tears. Feel the weight of sadness that comes with a broken world. Then, again as you’re sensing the Spirit lead you (not too soon!), express the hinge of all laments: “Jesus, You didn’t fix me, You joined me!” Allow your lament to move from me-centered to God-centered, and then take time to marvel at the beauty of the God who joined us.

Questions for Community:

- Was that a difficult experience for you? A meaningful one? Why?

Individual Practice

Set aside at least an hour of quiet so that you can come honestly before God asking Him to show you areas of your life that need to be mourned. There may be past trauma, injustice, lost opportunity, unfulfilled dreams, and many other types of grief. Rather than seeking to be exhaustive, ask the Spirit to bring to mind very specifically what scars you have that need to be offered up through lament. As He does, bring them before Him. Writing is often the best vehicle. Express your heart on paper, especially the deep longing for the presence of God amid suffering. Remember back to both the struggles and the blessings that came from that time (Genesis 50:20). Invariably you will find yourself “crossing the line” into a God-centered posture. Rest in that and allow Him to minister to you.

Week Seven: Joy, the Missing Fruit

"I have a friend who is a dean in a theological seminary where men and women are being trained to be pastors. Sometimes he calls one of these people into his office and says something like this: 'You have been around here for several months now, and I have had an opportunity to observe you. You get good grades, seem to take your calling to ministry seriously, work hard and have clear goals. But I don't detect any joy. You doing seem to have any pleasure in what you are doing. And I wonder if you should not reconsider your calling into ministry. For if a pastor is not in touch with joy, it will be difficult to teach or preach convincingly that the news is good. If you do not convey joy in your demeanor and gestures and speech, you will not be an authentic witness for Jesus Christ. Delight in what God is doing is essential in our work.'"

Eugene Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*

"These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full."

Jesus of Nazareth, John 15:11

A "Rule of Life" is most often paralleled to a trellis—a structure that allows a plant or vine to get up off the ground and gives it the space and organization it needs to grow, thrive, and produce fruit. That final aspect—producing fruit—is the unmistakable mark of a thriving plant. A plant that grows like crazy and spreads to every corner of the garden but isn't bearing much fruit only becomes a nuisance. Plants should bear fruit!

The same is true for us. One of the principles of a rule of the life is that it should be flexible. Margaret Guenther says that it should be "subject to regular review and revision." But how is it measured? By whether we like it or not? Whether it contains each of the aspects that my spiritual mentor or some hero of the faith has in theirs? Or just whether it's time for a change? I would argue that there's a clear measuring stick: joy. Jesus said that He came that we would have life to the full. That doesn't mean that it's always easy or happy, but it does mean that there's always joy being produced. Paul tells us that the fruit of life in the Spirit is, among other things, joy. And that joy is dependent on the presence of Jesus, not my circumstances.

Practice in Community

Have somebody read John 15:11 and Galatians 5:16-26. Discuss the following questions:

- Who do you know that has a life marked by joy? What are the ways that you notice it?
- What are the action verbs/commands in Galatians 5:16-26? Why is that important?

The stated goal for our rule of life, according to Ken Shigematsu is "not to be harsh or confining. It is to cultivate fruit." One portion of that fruit is joy. Break into groups of 3 or 4, and talk about the rule of life that you are putting together. If you've completed it, walk through it completely. Ask some key questions of those in your group:

- Is my rule realistic? Are there any portions that seem unrealistic now that could be edited out or revisited in the future?
- Could any portion of my rule be simplified?
- Is each component of my rule specific and measurable?
- Are there any specific practices that seem to be missing?
- If only one new habit or discipline made it into your life based on this exercise, which one would you want it to be?

Questions for Community:

- How can our community keep one another accountable to each of our Rules without being legalistic?
- How soon do we want to revisit our Rules together?

Individual Practice

The final practice for this guidebook is simple: Complete your rule of life, if you haven't already, using the pages that follow. For a more robust journey through developing a rule of life, I would recommend Stephen Macchia's book "Crafting a Rule of Life." There are countless other forms to use—we've borrowed from practicingtheway.org, but there are many other organizations who have frameworks to utilize when developing a personal rule of life.

When your rule is complete, share it with someone else. Invite them into accountability for you as you live into this rule and get their feedback on both the rule and how your life is changing as you practice it.

Appendix: How to Develop a Personal Rule of Life

“How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives.”

Annie Dillard, [The Writing Life](#)

As we’ve looked at throughout this guidebook, a rule of life is not intended to be strict or binding, nor should it be imposed upon you by someone else. Rather, in the same way a vine needs a trellis to lift it off the ground so that it can bear fruit, so we each need a rule to organize our lives around the call to “abide in the vine.” (John 15:1-8)

As you are considering a rule of life, you should think about four different rhythms. However, not every aspect of your rule must happen in each:

- Habits (Daily)
- Schedule (Weekly)
- Calendar (Monthly/Quarterly)
- Traditions (Annually)

Ken Shigematsu in his excellent book [God in My Everything](#) lists eight helpful reminders when developing a rule of life:

- **Start Simply.** Don’t try to change too much too fast. Some devoted quiet time in the morning and an alarm on your phone reminding you to stay in the presence of God in the middle of the day may be a significant jump towards Christ-awareness.
- **Build Slowly.** Add in new practices one at a time, evaluate them, and determine whether they are helpful. Start with one key practice that would be an addition to life for you.
- **Prune Regularly.** Spent at least as much time looking at what can come out of your life as you do what can be added. Work to create margin, not a packed schedule.
- **Be Aware of Your Energy.** No rule is one-size fits all. Make sure you are considering your flow of energy through the day and try to schedule key parts of your rule at optimum times for you.
- **Consider Your Life Stage.** Different people in different stages will have different rules. Be realistic with your situation in life and allow your rule to reflect it.
- **A Good Rule Bends.** Things happen. If something comes up and you can’t keep your rule for a day, week, or month, just come back to it

when you’re able. If a special guest is coming in on your fast day, there’s no harm in moving it or coming back to it next week. It’s the spirit of the rule, not the letter.

- **Make Time for Fun.** Your rule should include things that you really like to do, and you should engage them with joy and without guilt! A rule should not be drudgery. It should bring joy!
- **Include Community.** Many of us were brought up in a world where the faith journey was a private one. However, the Bible would beg to differ. We are called into a communal journey, and we need one another with us if we are to experience lasting change.

It’s important to consider the concept of “Upstream Practices” and “Downstream Practices,” which I first heard about from A.J. Sherrill. Basically, upstream practices are things that don’t come naturally for you, but you know are good for you. Fasting is an upstream practice for me—I don’t like it, but I know that I need to do it. On the other hand, downstream practices are those that come naturally and easily to you. For me that’s spiritual reading. I could do it all day just about every day. The goal with a rule of life is to recognize which practices are upstream and which are downstream, and then balance them appropriately so that you are experiencing both growth and joy.

There are many ways to develop a rule of life. This one is taken from practicingtheway.org because it aligns with our stated goals of an apprentice: Being With Jesus, Becoming Like Jesus, and Doing What Jesus Did. Under those larger goals are seven practices, as follows:

- **Being With Jesus:** Abiding and Mind
- **Becoming Like Jesus:** Body, Relationships and Rest
- **Doing What Jesus Did:** Work & Money, Gospel & Hospitality

In each of these areas there might be Daily, Weekly, Monthly/Quarterly, or Annual practices that align with these. In some areas there may be overlap as well. The goal of utilizing the seven practices is to balance the rule, not to make sure that there are unique portions of the rule for each practice. For instance, my time of solitude and silence each morning encompasses: Abiding (quiet meditation), Mind (Bible reading and spiritual reading, along with not accessing my phone), and Relationships (prayer for others).

Using the following prompts, you can design your own Rule of Life:

Abiding: We create space using the practices of Jesus for the Spirit to transform us into people of love by directing our attention to Him throughout the day.

- Examples: morning prayer, Scripture reading, worship music, daily office, the examen, sabbath, fasting, silence and solitude, retreats.
- Baseline practice: Daily quiet time away from your phone, weekly sabbath, and church on Sunday.
- What practices should be a part of your abiding daily, weekly, monthly/quarterly, and yearly?

Mind: What we give attention to is what we will become. We are called to curate our mind to develop the “mind of Christ” (Philippians 2:5-8) by guarding our minds from unhelpful and unhealthy inputs.

- Examples: morning reading, regular podcasts/books, church on Sunday, gratitude journal, digital rule of life, digital sabbath, limits on device usage and screen time, etc.
- Baseline practice: Disengage with screens on a daily, weekly, and annual basis, limit your use of entertainment, commit to the regular intake of solid teaching through reading, podcasts, etc. Gratitude.
- What practices should be a part of your mind daily, weekly, monthly/quarterly, and yearly?

Body: Because we are whole people, spiritual health includes attention to our physical bodies as well. This shouldn’t feed the body obsession of our culture, but rather, offering our bodies as a living sacrifice.

- Examples: getting enough sleep, regular exercise, a healthy diet, water, limiting alcohol intake, walking, rising at a certain time, doctor’s visits, honoring God with your sexuality.
- Baseline practice: Commit to sleep a minimum of seven hours a night, some form of exercise regularly, and eat well.
- What practices should be a part of your body daily, weekly, monthly/quarterly, and yearly?

Relationships: We are created for relationship, and we are called to cultivate healthy relationships in a variety of spaces.

- Examples for friendship: weekly phone call or coffee with friend, scheduling a connection over a meal
- Examples for church: weekly connection with Community Group, church on Sunday, regular House Parties, serving others, etc.

- Examples for marriage: 15-minute touchpoint each day, weekly date night, cultivating healthy sexual connection, getaways/vacation, etc.
- Examples for family: dinner together 3 nights/week, sabbath, weekly connections between parents/kids, vacation, family movie night, etc.
- Baseline practice: Weekly meal with all/part of your Community Group and some daily/weekly touchpoints with spouse/children and other family members or close friends.
- What practices should be a part of your relationships daily, weekly, monthly/quarterly, and yearly?

Rest: Rest is essential to spiritual formation, allowing us to withstand temptation and love others well.

- Examples: morning quiet time, sleeping at least seven hours a night, weekly sabbath, having one night “free” each week, etc.
- Baseline practice: Daily quiet time and weekly sabbath
- What practices should be a part of your rest daily, weekly, monthly/quarterly, and yearly?

Work/Money: Work was an original part of God’s design (Genesis 2), so what we do with our work and resources truly matters. A life of simplicity and generosity is a core tenet to Jesus’ vision of life in the Kingdom.

- Examples: times of “deep work” each week, a fixed hour schedule, tithing, creating a blessing fund, sponsoring a child, etc.
- Baseline practice: Commit to spend several hours a day devoted to your most important work, give away a minimum of 10% of your gross income, pay special attention to the church and the poor. *Note: If you’re new to this practice, set a modest goal to give away (1%-2% of your income) and show love to someone at your workplace weekly.*
- What practices should be a part of your work/money daily, weekly, monthly/quarterly, and yearly?

Gospel/Hospitality: We are called to take the message of Jesus into the world, and this happens through welcoming those from all walks of life.

- Examples: weekly hosting neighbors for dinner, spending time listening to co-workers, inviting friends to church/Alpha, volunteering.
- Baseline practice: Invite a friend who doesn’t yet know Jesus over for dinner once a month and to church/Alpha at least once a year.
- What practices should be a part of your gospel/hospitality daily, weekly, monthly/quarterly, and yearly?