

Developing a Rule of Life (rhythm of life)



A rule of life helps to abide in Christ. It is like a trellis for a vine to allow our spiritual life to grow, develop and be fruitful

The concept of a Rule of Life has been present in the Christian tradition since its earliest days

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.” (Acts 2:42)

The concept was developed during the time of the desert fathers and mothers. Firmly established in the 6th century when Benedict of Nursia developed a rule that would govern the life of the monastic communities under his oversight.

1. Some Definitions

- “A Rule of Life is an intentional pattern of spiritual disciplines that provides structure and direction for growth in holiness. A Rule establishes a rhythm for life in which is helpful for being formed by the Spirit, a rhythm that reflects a love for God and respect for how he has made us. The disciplines which we build into our rhythm of life help us to shed the ‘old self’ and allow our ‘new self’ in Christ to be formed. Spiritual disciplines are means of grace by which God can nourish us. Ultimately a Rule should help you to love God more, so if it becomes a legalistic way of earning points with God or impressing others, it should be scrapped. If the traditional, ancient term ‘rule’ concerns you because it sounds legalistic, think of ‘rule’ as a ‘rhythm of life’ or as a ‘Curriculum in Christlikeness’ (Dallas Willard), or as a ‘Game Plan for Morphing’ (John Ortberg).” http://www.cslewisinstitute.org/webfm_send/338
- A rule of life is “a guideline we choose to regulate our lives in order to facilitate our spiritual growth.” (Leighton Ford, *The Attentive Life*, 20)
- “A rule for life offers unique and regular rhythms that free and open each person to the will and presence of Christ. The spiritual practices of a rule provide a way to partner with the Holy Spirit for personal transformation.” (Calhoun, 35)
- “A personal rule of life is a way of ordering our lives to catch the wind of grace.” (Thompson, *Pastors Guide*, 140)
- “A rule of life seeks to respond to two questions: Who do I want to be? How do I want to live? Actually, it might be more accurate to say that a rule of life seeks to address the interplay between these two questions: How do I want to live so I can be who I want to be?” (Barton, 147)

2. Why develop a Rule or Rhythm of Life?

- a. Helps one stay focused in the journey toward Christlikeness
- b. Not intended to be restrictive and legalistic. Things included in one's rule should provide "a brief and realistic scaffold of disciplines that support your heart's desire to grow in loving God and others." (Calhoun, 36)
- c. "Ultimately a rule will help you love God more. If it becomes a legalistic way of earning points with God, it should be scrapped." (Calhoun, 36)

3. Things to consider in developing a Rule of Life

- a. You are developing a rule for YOUR life.
- b. It is critical to honestly consider your actual life circumstances and commitments in this season of your life.
 - Are you married or single?
 - Do you have children?
 - Do you care for aging parents?
 - Do you have deep friendships that you cherish and are committed to nurturing?
 - Do you view your vocation as a calling from God?
- b. What about your personality and character?
 - Are you an introvert or extrovert?
 - Energetic or reserved?
 - Do you have physical or emotional limitations?
 - Are you a procrastinator or perfectionist?
 - Morning person or night person?
 - Do you like clear structure and regular habits, or spontaneity and variation?
 - Sensing and intuitive types might be helped by visual aids, candles, walking in nature, icons, and symbols.
 - Thinking types will be drawn to study and a solid, knowledge base for reflecting on their faith.
- c. What desires and longings are currently bubbling up in your spiritual life?
 - What do you think God is inviting you into these days?
 - Growth in prayer and engagement with scripture. What disciplines seem attractive to you in these days?
 - Guarding you thoughts, withholding judgments, seeking to live in the present moment, the cultivation of gratitude, etc.
 - Perhaps God is stirring you to attend to your physical body.
 - Diet, sleep, exercise.
 - Are you dealing with issues of compulsive shopping?

4. Putting together a Rule of Life

a. Build in BALANCE

- Include practices that come easy to you, as well as ones that stretch you and are a bit out of your comfort zone. God will often call us to grow by stretching us to develop the non-dominant side of our personality.

b. Build in FLEXIBILITY

- Avoid becoming rigid and legalistic, especially in the beginning attempts to form a rule. Life happens and we need to hold things loosely during those times when things do not go according to "plan."
- Be flexible, but guard your time.

c. Recognise the seasons of your life

- Life circumstances will help determine what you can actually do now. Each season of life provides an opportunity for God to teach us valuable lessons.

d. Picking and Choosing

- What do I need to let go of? What do I need to take up?
- If you are going to establish a new rhythm for your life, it almost always means that you will need to let something go in order to pick up something new.

5. Structuring your rule

- A helpful skeleton for developing your rule is to think in terms of: "What will I do... daily... weekly...monthly...half yearly...yearly?"
- What schedule changes will need to be made in your current life in order to accommodate those things that God is inviting you into?
- Who will be impacted by your proposed changes? Whom will you need to talk to about the changes you are thinking of making?
- Make sure to include some fun, joy, and play in your rule!
- Share your proposed rule with someone who knows you well. Get their input and feedback about your rule.
- Plan on evaluating your rule after about 6 months. This will provide enough time for you to begin to see what is working and what isn't.
- Do not give up because you do not keep it perfectly.
- It is critical to remember that each of us will need lots of God's grace to begin to actually live out our proposed Rule.
 - Ask God for grace to persevere, grace to recognize where things need to be adjusted, and grace to accept the fact that you can't keep it perfectly. The farther one travels on this journey toward Christlikeness, the more one recognizes the need for God's grace.

Some Resources for the Journey

- *Sacred Rhythms*, Ruth Haley Barton, 146-166.
- *Pray as a Place*, Charles Bello
- *Invitation to a Journey*, Robert Mulholland
- *Living Faith Day by Day*, Debra K. Farrington, iUniverse, 2006.
- *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, 35-39.
- *Soul Feast*, Marjorie Thompson.