

An aerial photograph of a city street intersection. A concrete bridge spans across the road. To the right, there is a green-painted bike lane with white directional arrows. The road has white lane markings and a yellow center line. A black car is visible on the left side of the road. The title 'DEVELOPING A PERSONAL RULE OF LIFE' is overlaid in white, bold, sans-serif capital letters across the center of the image.

DEVELOPING A PERSONAL RULE OF LIFE

What is a rule of life?

A rule of life is a schedule and set of practices and relational rhythms that help us create space in our busy world for us to be with God, be with others, and be sent—to live “to the full” (John 10v10) in his kingdom, and 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 15v1-8) 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.

“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

Wife, Mother, & Anglican Priest

What should I consider as I craft my rule of life?

Start small: As with creating any new set of goals, it's tempting to over-reach and attempt to live like a monk from day one. That is a strategy bound to fail! Start where you are, not where you feel you should be. Unrealistic goals just leave us discouraged and disillusioned. Doable, enjoyable goals move us forward in our spiritual formation. We've included a "baseline practice" for each of the seven categories, but you may need to work toward that as an eventual goal. If that means "daily prayer" is ten minutes to read one psalm and offer one prayer, great. Just start where you're at and move forward at a deliberate, but relaxed pace.

Be specific: Look for practices that are practical, concrete, and embodied, not vague and ideological. I.e., "Sabbath on Sundays" not "be more relaxed."

Consider your personality: If you're introverted, carve out plenty of time to be alone in the quiet. If you're more extroverted, make sure you get a lot of time with friends. But also do your best to architect a balance that works for you.

Consider your season of life and stage of discipleship: If you have little kids, start very small, and go really easy on yourself. If you're new to following Jesus and just beginning to learn about practices like silence and solitude or sabbath, don't copy someone who is twenty years down the road. Just take the next step in your journey.

Keep a healthy balance of upstream and downstream practices: By upstream, we mean practices that may feel hard for you, but really move your soul toward growth. And by downstream, we mean those practices that you find fun, living giving, easy and joyful. As a general rule, we need just a few upstream practices, and lots of downstream practices.

Keep a healthy balance of structure and spontaneity: Don't let your rule become rigid, boring, or a legalistic, dull obligation. And never let it override the Spirit's frequently unscheduled interruptions in our days. A good rule should feel like freedom, not slavery.

Remember that a good rule is a working document: Like us, it's dynamic, not static. Life is a bit of a moving target, so we have to regularly review our rule and make sure it's still bringing us life with God and others. If you are sacrificing healthy relationship (with God or others) in order to accomplish your "rule," this version of your rule has ceased to aid you in the goal of drawing closer to God and becoming a person of love.

How to use this workbook

This workbook 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: Draft your rule of life. Come back to the chart and fill in each category as you see fit. Don’t feel the pressure to have something in every box, remember: rather than a rigid, legalistic to-do list, it’s a life-giving structure for freedom, growth, and joy.

Step 4: Try it out. Spend a few weeks living into your rule, and see how it feels. If it feels burdensome or boring, pay attention to that 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 it with a partner, close friend, or community member.

Step 5: Revise and commit. Based on step 4, adjust your rule to what seems best, and commit to it for an extended season of time (we recommend a minimum of three months, and maximum of a year). 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 “abiding” 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.

1. Abiding

2. Mind

3. Body

4. Relationships

5. Rest

6. Work & Money

7. Gospel & Hospitality

PRACTICES	Abide	Mind	Rest	Body	Relationships	Work & Money	Gospel & Humanity
Daily							
Weekly							
Monthly							
Quarterly							
Annually							



ABIDING

Through practices (also known as spiritual disciplines 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”? To 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, praying the 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 read a Psalm and notice God’s presence, and gather 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?



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. 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 on and input from digital devices to keep it healthy, free of temptation and distraction, and set on God’s loving, joyful presence?

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

Recommended baseline practice: commit to disengage from screens for a specified amount of time 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, etc. and the daily habit of gratitude and hope. If you’re new to this practice, we recommend you begin your day by reading from 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?



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?



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: a kind of neo-gnostic spirituality that sees the body as no more than a container to carry “us” around until we die. 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 and junk food, walking, waking 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 best friend, regular times to connect over a meal, etc.

Examples for church: weekly meal with your group, gathering on Sundays, regular parties, serving together, pursuing relationships across lines of class and ethnicity, etc.

Examples for marriage: a fifteen-minute touch point 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 date, annual vacation, family movie/game night, etc.

Recommended baseline practice: commit to a weekly meal with your community and some daily and weekly touch points 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?



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 God’s 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: inviting a friend to Alpha, 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 Alpha or church 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?

“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 49

Further Resources & Ideas

Practicing the Way practicingtheway.org

Bible Project bibleproject.com

Join a Group cccgo.com/groups

Learn about Neighboring cccgo.com/outreach

The Roadmap cccgo.com/roadmap