

Creating a Rule of Life in a time of Pandemic

Rule of Life Overview

“A rule, or rhythm, of life is a way of ordering our lives around the values, practices and relationships that keep us open and available to God for the work of spiritual transformation that only God can bring about. Simply put, a rule of life provides structure and space for our growing.” Ruth Haley Barton, Sacred Rhythms

1. A Rule of Life is not a rule book. We hear rule and think of a hardset, legalistic routine. It is more helpful to think of a rule of life as a line to follow, a trellis on which to hang our spiritual practices and disciplines. It is a way of ordering our lives in order to facilitate becoming who we want to become.
2. A Rule of Life will be different for each person. Don't take someone else's Rule of Life as your own (your friend, your pastor or mentor, a current teacher or leader, a spiritual great from church history). Your rule of life needs to reflect who you are, your own desires, what God is doing in your life and who you want to become.
3. A Rule of Life needs to be flexible and dynamic, changing and adapting when needed. A spiritual practice that is lifegiving in one season of your life may need to be replaced by another. That said, you don't want to be constantly changing your rhythms. Once you develop a rule of life, live it out for six months and then evaluate.
4. A Rule of Life needs to be doable in order to be sustainable. It is better to start off modestly and add components as you go along.
5. Remember it's all grace! Putting together a Rule of Life can feel like making a New Year's Resolution - and we know how those usually work out! We approach a rule of life with the acknowledgment that we are helpless to pursue a deeper relationship with God on our own - but knowing that it is in our helplessness we access God's power and grace.

Review Your Life and Desires

1. Listen to your desire toward God and your life in God. Reflection: What do I desire my relationship with God to look like?
2. What is the “good life,” the abundant life to which I am invited by Jesus? Reflection: What do I desire my life to look like?
3. What am I experiencing in this season of pandemic? Where do I see God working ? What are the challenges I am facing? What emotions am I experiencing.?
4. In what areas of your life do you feel God is inviting you to engage in spiritual transformation? Where are you getting stuck in your life? Reflection: If someone told you that you were going to live forever, what is the one thing in your life you would want to see changed?
5. What spiritual practices and exercises have been particularly lifegiving? What activities do you find lifegiving (i.e. Sabbath, church/community, exercise, hobbies, walks.)

Putting A Rule of Life Together

1. Review your answers to the previous questions. Which practices/disciplines/activities might be helpful in this season of life to

- help engage your desire for a deeper relationship with Jesus?
- help you enter into your vision of the “good life”?
- help you cooperate with God in spiritual transformation?
- help you process your emotions in a healthy way?

2. Based on these answers, put together a simple plan, a rule of life, which will incorporate these desires, practices and activities into your daily, weekly and monthly rhythms of life.

Adapting Your Rule of Life For COVID-19

In light of the challenges we face during this time of Pandemic, here are some practices/disciplines/activities that might help you to engage in your desire to enter into the peace of Jesus on an on-going basis.

Scripture meditation - Not Bible study or reading large sections, but contemplative reading. Scriptures about trusting God in trouble and rooting ourselves deeply in God. Psalms are especially powerful.

Prayer of Awareness of Emotions

Gratitude Journal - possibly in conjunction with the Daily Examen. Gratitude is a powerful antidote to fear and anxiety.

Breath Prayers - Jesus help me trust in you; Lord, make me aware of You; Jesus, gratitude

Devotional Walks in Nature - walk slowly, use all your senses, let creation speak to you

Disconnecting from News/Social Media/Devices

Community - be creative during this time of self-isolation - what are ways we can connect deeply and redemptively with other people - ECV on-line events, one-on-one outside get-togethers, walks with one other person (maintaining social distance)

Mourning Loss

So which of these practices are you attracted to? How might you incorporate one or more of these practices and activities into your daily and weekly rhythms of life?

Questions to Ask Your Rule of Life

- Will it help me be attentive to God?
- Will it help me live like Christ?
- Does it fit with the Spirit's work in my life?
- Is it inhabitable? Can I really live this?
- Would it be life-giving
- Is it health-promoting? Physically? Emotionally? Relationally? Vocationally? Financially?
- Is it sustainable?
- Will it help me live missionally?
- Does it contain rhythms of rest and renewal?
- Does it fit with my personality?
- Is it congruent with my life circumstances?
- Will it go well with my family's life? Work?
- Will it help me grow in the direction I desire and need to grow?
- Will it help me flourish?

Connecting Desires with Spiritual Practices and Disciplines

Desires/Areas of Transformation	Spiritual Practices and Disciplines
Shame → Acceptance	Solitude, Prayer of Recollection, Scripture Meditation, Lectio Divina, Confession, Community
Busyness → Peace	Slowing, Rest, Discernment, Centering Prayer, Examen
Fear → Freedom	Scripture meditation, Lectio Divina, Discernment, Confession
Distracted → Being Present	Unplugging, Rest, Exercise, Solitude, Slowing, Discernment, Hospitality
Self-awareness, Authenticity	Examen, Community, Confession, Unplugging Scripture Meditation, Community, Confession, Prayer of Recollection
Joy, Sense of wonder	Celebration, Rest, Slowing, Centering Prayer
Gratitude	Slowing, Community, Celebration
Hearing God's voice	Solitude, Centering Prayer, Unplugging, Lectio Divina, Discernment

You can find more about spiritual practices and disciplines in the Handbook of Spiritual Disciplines by Adele Calhoun.