

A RULE OF LIFE

WHAT IS A RULE OF LIFE?

At some point in your life, you've probably found yourself thinking, "I wish I could just live more ____." You fill in your own blank—healthily, socially, actively, curiously, intentionally, whatever it may be. And if you haven't thought that way, chances are, you probably will one day.

Most of us desire to live a well-ordered life that reflects what we truly believe about ourselves, the world, and God. Yet it is not uncommon for us to move through our minutes, days, months, and years with one area or more consuming most of our energy, leaving little time for the things that matter, leaving us off-kilter and depleted.

The question is not, "Do you have a rule of life?" We all have a rule—written or unwritten, intentional or unintentional. The question is this: do we know what it is? Do we know what it's doing to us? The things we do, do something to us. We become what we give attention to. We make our choices and then our choices make us.

So ponder this: What if the good life doesn't come from doing whatever we want but having the ability to do what we were made for? Enter: a Rule of Life.

A Rule of Life is a way of setting out intentionally to live a new way, but for the Christian, the blank is filled with the most important adverb there is: "closely with God." Pete Scazzero, author of *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, puts it best when he describes a Rule of Life as "an intentional, conscious plan to keep God at the center of everything we do."

Now, don't be scared off by the word "rule." That word is "regula" and comes from the original word for "trellis"—a structure in a garden that helps lift a vine or plant off the ground and allow it to grow and flourish. Rather than a rigid and strict set of laws that are handed down and rigid, a Rule of Life is a self-generated, flexible, relationship-based structure designed to help us grow, flourish, and be fruitful.

That's the life God designed us to live.

Focus more on the word "life," less on the word "rule." It's about setting a course for our lives, especially ones rooted in and abiding with Christ.

In John 15:1-8, Jesus illustrates the vine and the branches, and it's clear here that our call to bear fruit can only be done when we abide with the branch, Jesus himself. When we set out to craft a Rule of Life, the goal is to intentionally create space to abide in Christ—being with him and becoming like him for the sake of the world.

A rule of life is different than the goals, intentions, or resolutions we tend to set for ourselves. Those methods are task-based and measurable, and they're often focused on what we do. A rule of life, on the other hand, helps you *become*. It focuses on deep spiritual transformation through small adjustments in the way we live and think. It's about playing the long game and building long-term habits that us know Christ deeply and share him constantly.

SO, WHY CREATE A RULE OF LIFE?

"I'm going to focus more on God this year."

Easier said than done. We've made a fatal assumption that if we get our thinking right, our lives will just follow. For many of us, the house of our life is decorated with Christian content, but the architecture is exactly like everyone else's. But it takes more than good doctrine and right thinking for our habits and lifestyle to follow.

Creating a Rule of Life takes the beautiful goal of living a life intentionally centered on God and makes it actionable, showing how small habits in our lives transform our focus, our energy, our emotions—not to mention our ability to love and serve those around us.

If we are going to be serious about leading a life as a devoted follower of Jesus Christ, we need to rethink what it means to be a disciple, what it means to live the Christian life, what it means to live a life of love. We need to find a way to order our entire lives around our relationship with the Triune God, not just stack church activities on top of the rest of our lives.

Take this for example: in Scripture, we read about Daniel, who had his own "code of conduct", if you will. The Bible doesn't call it a Rule of Life, but it models the same concept. Daniel 1 and Daniel 6 outline his practices of abiding with God, his prayer life, even his way of eating. And he defended this Rule of Life regardless of the den of lions he faced for living this way.

Just as Daniel did, we can each create our own Rule of Life to live a life with intentional focus on God, the things that bring us joy and fulfillment, and the ones that we love and seek to give our best to. Even our most ordinary, boring habits are acts of worship. The crucible of our formation is in the monotony of our daily routines.

Creating a Rule of Life is a way we set the course toward building lifelong habits to be with Jesus and become like Him for the sake of the world—a transformation that reaps so much more than a goal to lose a few pounds or make it to church a few more times, even though those are good things, too.

A Rule of Life makes the *best* thing the end goal—a deeply rooted life in Christ.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

So we're ready to get started, but as with any good planning, there's a couple things to consider. We're setting a course, but if we don't think about the whole journey before embarking, we might find ourselves tempted to jump ship.

Here's the practical ones:

1. **Keep a close eye on your life.** Intentional living with a Rule of Life requires us to take time to evaluate our own lives. What's your pace? Are you introverted or extroverted? What priorities and responsibilities do you have to think about? Consider your family, social life, finances, career, and anything else that shapes the way you live. Ultimately, the way you live touches all of these factors.
2. **Keep it realistic, yet challenging.** A Rule of Life is designed to create small but intentional habits that transform your life and faith in big ways. Habits eat willpower for breakfast. If you have to will your way into your rule, it might be unsustainable.
3. **Be specific.** Set practices that are specific and concrete, not vague and ideological. I.e., "Sabbath on Sundays" not "be more relaxed."
4. **Adapt as you go.** Your Rule of Life should be considered a "working document". God is glorified in every step you take, big or small, and if he can extend grace to you, you can extend it to yourself. Feel the freedom to fine-tune your Rule of Life as you go.

And now, the most important reminders:

5. **Think about what brings you life.** Remember, this is more about “life” than even the “rule.” For every person, there are things that bring them life, joy, peace, and purpose. Turn away from the thoughts that everything in your life needs to fit into your Rule of Life, but remember, the things most important to you should.
6. **This is about building a trellis.** You may have some old structures to tear down, but focus on *building* even more. There are good habits that you can lean into more, and there are new ones you can start.
7. **Keep Christ at the core.** Your Rule of Life is designed to help you abide in Christ, so you can’t do this apart from him. Pray over your Rule of Life, asking for wisdom and strength to set out on this course to honor God more fully in your life. And, as always, leave room for the Spirit to move and interrupt.
8. **Don’t do this alone.** Accountability and support are key ways we bring about change in our life. Share what you’re doing with a spouse or a friend, and encourage them to point out where you’re doing well and not so well. You’ll be thankful for it.

HOW TO USE THE TEMPLATE

Take a look at the downloadable template. You’ll see a couple of columns, and this is a recommended way to organize your habits while keeping the overall goal in mind. Our mission is to be with Jesus and become like Him for the sake of the world, so the chart broken down in this way.

Write out your habits based on their aim. Ask, with each habit, “Is this helping me be with Jesus more, become more like Him, or impact the world through Him?” Here’s some examples:

Prayer: The aim of this habit is to help me *BE*, to spend more intentional time listening to God and talking to Him.

Community: The aim of this habit is to help me *BECOME* more like Christ, sharing my faith and serving others.

Generosity: The aim of this habit is *FOR THE SAKE OF THE WORLD*, because living generously with my time and resources models the kindness of Christ to others.

Aim to find one that fits in each category, and from there, create actionable steps daily, weekly, or monthly that will help you build this rhythm into your life. Your daily, weekly, and monthly goals should be where they get specific (i.e. Have *one* meal with a friend *weekly*).

Check out the example below, then download a blank copy for yourself to act as your working document.

AIM	BE	BECOME	FOR THE SAKE OF THE WORLD
HABIT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prayer • Scripture • Silence & Solitude 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rest • Community • Simplicity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hospitality • Vocation • Money
DAILY	Quiet time every morning, kneeling prayer 3 times a day	8 hours of sleep nightly, 15 minute touchpoint with spouse or family	Set and honor work and rest schedule
WEEKLY	Sabbath for 24 hours once a week	Three shared meals with family at the table, attend a Bible study or group	Tithe or give to a nonprofit or community project
MONTHLY	Fast for 24 hours once a month	Serve in the community once monthly with family	Host a new neighbor or friend for dinner once a month
YEARLY	Retreat once each year to pray and reflect	Take a family vacation once a year	Find a family service project to do each Christmas

AREAS TO CONSIDER

1. INTIMACY WITH GOD

Before we are ever called to do anything *for* God, we are called to be *with* God.

Theologically educated is not the same as spiritually formed, and the goal of creating rhythms for intimacy with God is to *know* God, not just know *about* God. As you craft a Rule of Life, think about time to simply be with God and build practices that make this feel slow, meaningful, and intentional.

Examples: morning and evening kneeling prayer, daily Scripture reading, worship music, sabbath, fasting, silence and solitude, receiving communion, etc.

Ask: What do you currently practice, officially or unofficially, in this area of your life? What practices would you like to add in, cut out, or change?

2. MIND

Colossians 3:2 says, “Set your minds on things above.” Another translation says it this way: “Think about the things of heaven” (NLT). Our minds have incredible capacity, and we become what we behold. We have the responsibility of inputting things that form us spiritually (like Scripture, meditation, Sabbath, listening to sermons, etc.) and limiting things that can deform us spiritually when it’s not monitored (like social media, news outlets, and other entertainment feeds). As you craft your Rule of Life, think about structuring it with practices that help you behold Christ and deepen your appreciation for Him.

Examples: scripture reading and memorization, meditation, rest and Sabbath, Bible studies, gratitude, prayer, screen-time limits, etc.

Ask: What do you currently practice, officially or unofficially, in this area of your life? What practices would you like to add in, cut out, or change?

3. BODY

1 Corinthians 6:19 calls the body “a temple of the Holy Spirit”. God dwells inside our human bodies, calling us and empowering us to good works (Eph. 2:10), and it is our responsibility to take care of our bodies physically so we are able to worship fully. To be a temple, though, also challenges us to keep the body *holy*. There are spiritual practices that can help you maintain both healthiness and cleanliness. As you craft a Rule of Life, think practically and spiritually about caring for your body in these ways.

Examples: sleep and rest, regular exercise, a healthy diet and fasting, water, limiting alcohol intake, stress management, and aligning sexuality with the teachings of Jesus.

Ask: What do you currently practice, officially or unofficially, in this area of your life? What practices would you like to add in, cut out, or change?

4. COMMUNITY

God Himself lives in the community of the Trinity, and He designed us the same way, from the Garden of Eden in Genesis 1. Growing spiritually requires being with Jesus and becoming more like Him in the context of community, where we can be authentic and vulnerable, serve and pray together, share burdens and celebrate joys, and sharpen one another. As you craft your Rule of Life, think about the relationships in

your life (marriage, children and family, friendships, church groups, etc.) and ways you can be intentional with each to cultivate healthy community.

Examples (by category):

- Marriage: scheduled date nights, cultivating healthy sexual connection, regular retreats or getaways
- Children & Family: shared meals, weekly Sabbath together, annual family vacations
- Friendships: regularly connecting over meal or coffee, weekly check-in via phone call or text
- Church Groups: attending church together, joining a Bible study or group, serving with others

Ask: What do you currently practice, officially or unofficially, in this area of your life? What practices would you like to add in, cut out, or change?

5. REST

The commandment to honor the Sabbath and rest is one of the greatest proofs of God's grace to us, because He asks us to set apart time to accomplish nothing for Him but to worship. Resting is key to our health both spiritually and physically, because when we are well-rested, we are readied to serve and love well. Think about your ability to handle stress and emotions when you've gotten a full night's sleep as opposed to a sleepless night. Which version of yourself would you rather present to the world? As you craft your Rule of Life, think about God's design for you to rest and prioritize it.

Examples: daily morning quiet time, a set sleep schedule, Sabbath once a week for 24 hours, etc.

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

6. WORK AND GENEROSITY

Work, as hard as it may be at times, is a good thing. We were created for work. But in a culture that glorifies busyness, we have to remember: we can work as worship, or we

can worship our work. Work has the power to resource our ability to live generously and care for ourselves, but it also has the power to create idolatry, greed, and unhealthy rhythms of caring for our bodies, minds, and souls. Work for the purpose of worship and generosity, as a way to share your time, talent, and treasure with others to show the kindness and sacrifice of our God. As you craft your Rule of Life, build habits into your work life and financial life to make stewarding your work and money part of your life before God.

Examples: a fixed work schedule, tithing to your church, giving to a nonprofit or charity you are passionate about, sponsoring important work or projects, etc.

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

7. HOSPITALITY

Jesus was known for the way he interacted with society's castaways—the marginalized, the forgotten, the unclean, the corrupt, and yes, the sinners. Through his example, Christians are called to fling the doors wide open for every person to be drawn near, where they experience the love of God and his people. John 13:35 says, "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." Hospitality is the love of Christ in action. As you craft your Rule of Life, think about ways you can go out of your way to welcome in people from every walk of life and to live intentionally with open arms.

Examples: inviting others to church; hosting meals in your home; serving needs in your church, neighborhood, or community, etc.

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

TIME TO GET STARTED.

As we each get started on the craftsmanship of our own Rule of Life, let's remember what it's all about—to be with Jesus and become like Him for the sake of the world, across all areas of our lives. It will be a worthwhile journey, and we're praying with you and for you every step of the way.

AIM	BE	BECOME	FOR THE SAKE OF THE WORLD
HABIT			
DAILY			
WEEKLY			
MONTHLY			
YEARLY			

