

Legacy Collective / Spiritual Disciplines / Rule Of Life

What is it?

- A *Rule of Life* is an intentional pattern of spiritual disciplines that provides structure and direction for growth in holiness.
 - A *spiritual discipline* is simply a rhythmic practice in which we grow in Christ. It's what we *do* to nurture our affections for God.
 - Jerry Bridges rightly defines discipline as, "structured, planned training."¹ So, disciplines that are planned and protected that groom our love for God are spiritual disciplines.
 - One of the first real Rules For Life can be found in Acts 2:42

Acts 2:42: And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

- Later, monasteries that arose from bands of wandering hermit monks would apply *Rules For Life* to their daily, weekly, and even hourly routine. They'd elevate discipline.
- "*The Rule offered disciplines that made space to attend to the supernatural presence of the Trinity...different than the cultural norms. Over the years Christians have developed Rules and rhythms for living that center their lives in loving Christ rather than the world.*"²
- A Rule establishes a rhythm for life which is helpful for being formed by the Spirit. This is a rhythm that (1) reflects a love for God and (2) respect for how he has made us.
- Remember, 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.
 - Consider that Mary held more the posture of a spiritual discipline than even the disciplined Martha. (Luke 10:38-42)
- 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).
 - More contemporary terms have been, "rhythm" and "portion," "but Rule" is the traditional word for something non-legalistic in nature.
- In order to be life-giving, a Rule must be realistic!

¹ Jerry Bridges, *The Pursuit of Holiness*; (Navpress, 1978) page 139

² Adele Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook; Practices that Transform Us* (IVP Books, 2005) page 59

- It is not an ideal toward which you are striving to soar. Instead, your initial Rule should be a minimum standard for your life that you do not want to drop below.
 - S.M.A.R.T. goals would be helpful here in finding out what pace works in different rhythms. Your personal Rule will see modifications over time.
- What is a *realistic level* of engaging in the spiritual disciplines for which you can *honestly and truly be held accountable*?
- Rules will vary widely, depending on the character and life situation of a person.
 - Although every believer should pray, for example, the frequency or length or times or kind of prayer will differ. (See Gary Thomas' Spiritual Pathways Assessment.)

"All cannot use the same kind of spiritual exercises, but one suits this person, and another that. Different devotions are suited also to the seasons [of life]..." Thomas à Kempis

The Rule which you write should include three things: (1) a self-assessment, (2) an explanation of how you will practice your chosen disciplines, and (3) your form of accountability.

First, provide a clear self-assessment that briefly describes your current situation in life—family responsibilities, work schedule, and other life circumstances.

- Your self-assessment should also reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of your character.
 - When and where do you feel closest to God? Are there particular practices that open you easily to God's presence? Are there also practices that slow this down or stymie it?
 - Are you blessed, for example, with self-control, a compassionate heart, a bright mind, or a spirit of joy? Which vices do you most struggle with?
- In general, talk over your self-assessment with someone who knows you well and ask for that person's candid feedback.
 - Beginning your Rule with an honest self-assessment will push you to develop a rhythm of life which is unique to your personality, circumstances, and needs.

Second, describe the way in which you will practice specific disciplines.

- Your Rule should include an explanation of why your choices not only fit your situation in life but also how they address areas where you especially need discipline and growth.
 - In other words, describe how your *Rule* contributes to the goal of your spiritual formation, namely, being conformed to the image of Christ for the sake of others.
 - Always remember this goal as you develop your *Rule*. Making choices about specific disciplines requires prayer and wisdom. As you decide on specific practices (e.g. how and when to pray, serve, practice simplicity, etc.), consider the following questions:
- 1. What disciplines and specific practices are you attracted to and why? There is nothing wrong with choosing spiritual practices because they seem suited to your personality (e.g. an introvert may be drawn to more inward disciplines).

- You will likely engage in those disciplines with the greatest consistency and satisfaction.
- 2. Where do you sense that God is calling you to stretch and grow? Where do you want to change? Ask yourself and God why you resist particular disciplines.
 - Perhaps a strong negative reaction to a practice such as fasting or solitude may reveal that you are avoiding a part of your life in need of healing.
 - Ask God to show you which disciplines you need in order to address weaknesses in your character.
- 3. What kind of balance do you need in your life? Does your Rule exercise your thoughts, actions, and affections (head, hands, and heart)? Does your Rule contain both corporate and individual practices? Both inward and outward disciplines?
 - Don't be confused by the title "Personal Rule of Life." It's a "Personal Rule" (as compared to a Communal Rule) because it's drawn up by you, it's about you, and you are the one committing yourself to it.
 - ...Yet, "Personal Rule" does not mean that you only engage in inward disciplines or private disciplines. Your personal Rule should include corporate disciplines (such as worship, confession, celebration, or spiritual direction) and outward disciplines (such as service, simplicity, or chastity).
- 4. If you could hear your own eulogy, what would you want to hear?
 - In other words, what *shape* would you like to be spiritually in such a way that it stood out to others? This will require, as Bridges says, "structured, planned training."
- 5. Is your Rule realistic for you to commit to?
 - A Rule is not a bunch of things you must add onto an already busy life.
 - The disciplines you choose should not only be realistic for your life but should also balance, help to prioritize, interweave, and impregnate your entire way of life, better enabling you to take your ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering.
 - A Rule that works for you will also be a Rule where you've had to cut some things out of your already moving routine however.
- Once you have chosen your spiritual disciplines and explained of your choices, briefly state who will hold you accountable and pray for you as you practice your Rule.
 - For this role, consider a friend, a small group (DNA) or a mentor of some kind. Spouses and other family members should know enough of your Rule to be able to encourage, or at least not interfere needlessly with, your practice.

Homework: Experience

- Read: The Mike Cospes Chapter *Discovering Our Disenchantment*
- Begin writing a Rule. You'll delete and edit much of it, but let's begin putting the bones of it together now. Much easier to begin thinking in this direction now. Answer the following:
 - When and where do you feel closest to God? Where could you be stretched?
 - Are there particular practices that open you easily to God's presence?
 - Are there also practices that slow this down or stymie it?
- As an example, here is a rough Rule for me (Luke).
 - Don't get freaked out by the scope. (1) I don't crush it in all areas. (2) It's my role and job that requires a bit more time (3) I've been developing this for quite some time.
 - Just put down what you're already doing well, and maybe a title or phrase that is looking forward for the areas you'd like to grow.
- **Annually**
 - Sabbatical From Preaching
 - Practiced Solitude
 - Study a single book of the bible in great depth
 - Have a *vision* retreat (1) alone for three days and (2) with others for two days.
- **Quarterly**
 - Have a two day *assessment* retreat
- **Monthly:**
 - On the 15th, Journaling where results don't define me. Gospel Self-Application.
 - Lamentation
- **Weekly:**
 - **Mondays:**
 - Deep Bible Study: Ignatian Contemplation
 - Solitude & Guided Prayer
 - Prayer of Examen: 5:45 AM, 11:00 AM, 3:30 PM, 8:30 PM
 - Prayer for Staff & Pastors (by name)
 - **Tuesdays:**
 - ACTS Study
 - Book Reading (heart oriented)
 - Prayer of Examen: 5:45 AM, 11:00 AM, 3:30 PM, 8:30 PM
 - Prayer for Legacy's Awakening & Knoxville's Revival
 - DNA (Chris)

- **Wednesday:**
 - ACTS Study
 - Book Reading (heart oriented)
 - Prayer of Examen: 5:45 AM, 11:00 AM, 3:30 PM, 8:30 PM
 - Prayer for Legacy Family Needs (individually when possible)
 - DNA (Kevin)
- **Thursday:**
 - Lectio Divina (Wisdom Literature)
 - Prayer of Examen: 5:45 AM, 11:00 AM, 3:30 PM, 8:30 PM
 - Prayer for the Lost (by name)
 - Group Bible Study
- **Friday:**
 - ACTS Study
 - Book Reading (heart oriented)
 - Prayer of Examen: 5:45 AM, 11:00 AM, 3:30 PM, 8:30 PM
 - Pray for Legacy's Health and Multiplication
- **Saturday:**
 - Sabbath
 - Prayer of Examen: 5:45 AM, 11:00 AM, 3:30 PM, 8:30 PM
- **Sunday:**
 - Corporate Gathering & Worship
 - Guided Prayer
 - Prayer of Examen: 5:45 AM, 11:00 AM, 3:30 PM, 8:30 PM
 - Written Thanksgiving
 - Prayer for City Leaders and Pastors.
- **Daily**
 - Prayer of Examen: 5:45 AM, 11:00 AM, 3:30 PM, 8:30 PM
 - Read (heart / hands / and head)
 - ACTS or Lectio Divina (by day)
 - Prayer for focus group (by day)