

A person is shown from the chest down, wearing a yellow shirt. They are holding a dark mug in their right hand and have their left hand on an open book. The background is dark and out of focus.

Spiritual Discipline - Rule for Life

“Christianity is a lifestyle - a way of being in the world that is simple, nonviolent, shared, and loving. However, we made it into an established “religion” (and all that goes with that) and avoided the lifestyle change itself. One could be warlike, greedy, racist, selfish and vain in most of Christian history and still believe that Jesus is one’s “personal Lord and Saviour” ... The world has not time for such silliness anymore. The suffering on Earth is too great.” – Richard Rohr

A *Rule for Life* offers unique and regular rhythms that free and open each other person to the will and presence of Christ. The spiritual practices of the rule provide a way to partner with the Holy Spirit for personal transformation.

Developing a *Rule for Life* is a way of being intentional about the personal rhythms and guideline that shape our days. One of the early Christian rules for life is found in Acts 2:42. Here we find that believers “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.” This rule shaped their lives and hearts in the circumstances they were in. It acknowledged the impossibility of becoming like Christ through effort alone.

A rule for life is a simple statement of the regular rhythms we choose in order to present our bodies to God as our “spiritual act of worship” (Romans 12:1) Each rule or rhythm is a way we partner with God for the transformation only he can bring. The rule for life is about...

(taking) your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering.

Romans 12:1 (The Message)

The *Rule for Life* is about living out our faith in the everyday. A rule honours your limits, your gifts and abilities. It is written for who you are, not who you aren’t. It addresses your world, your area of influence, your fears, your relationships, your work and attitudes.

Your rule is living; it can be easily changed at any point to fit your season of life or where God is challenging you. The aim is to love God and live like Him in the everyday. The following questions can provide you with insights about what is most important to you in a rule. If the word rule sounds to limiting or legalistic, maybe swap it out “rhythm of life.”

Writing a Rule

1. When and where do you feel closest to God? How do you enter most deeply into an awareness of His love for you?
Pay attention to the experiences, practices and relationships that draw you toward God. Are there particular practices that open you to God?
Are there practices that hinder your relationship with God?

2. What is important to you?
 What gives you a sense of security and self-worth?
 What would people who know you best say it's like to live and work with you?
 Where do your relationships need attention?
 What receives the most attention in your life? Spouse? Job? Family? Friends?
 Hobbies? (these are not bad things. But when we love them more than God, we have an idol in our heart)
3. What do you currently do to fulfil your goals? Work? Study? Pray? Network?
 Socialise? Diet? Exercise?
 Which of these things hinder and which help in your spiritual journey?
4. What practices suit your daily, monthly and yearly rhythms and cycles?
 What limitations are built into your life at this moment?
 What longings remain steady throughout?
 What responsibilities and rhythms change with various seasons?
5. Where do you want to change?
 Where do you feel powerless to change?
 Ask the Holy Spirit to help you do, through grace, what you cannot do through effort alone.
6. Choose several disciplines that arise from your desire for God's transforming work and that suit the limits and realities of your life. Begin your practice.

Sample Rules for Life

- Dedicate every day (in the morning) for the glory of God.
- Confess my sins before I go to bed.
- Worship the Lord alone and with others.
- Practice the presence of God.
- Don't hold grudges—forgive others.
- Eat sensibly.
- Pray for others.
- See my spiritual director once a month.
- Give all wandering thoughts to my Saviour.

Reflection Questions

1. What unspoken rules govern your life right now?
2. How do you determine what you will and won't do?
3. Does the idea of a rule for life appeal to you?
 Why or why not?
4. How has being disciplined affected your life?
5. How does a rule for life differ from a mission statement?

Spiritual Exercises

1. Write a rule for life using the questions in “Writing a Rule.” Take your time. Answer a question a day until you feel you have the information you need to write a life-giving rule.
2. Read the Rule of St. Benedict. What does this ancient rule show you about the Christian life?
 - What parts of this rule might encourage you today?
3. Look at the disciplines that consistently thread their way through Jesus’ life. How do they shape what he did or didn’t do?
 - Which of these disciplines do you consistently practice?
4. Consider where you are longing to change yet find changing difficult to impossible. Talk to God about this area in your life. Acknowledge your powerlessness to change through your own efforts. Ask God to give you a way of making space for him in the middle of this difficult place.
 - Consider which spiritual practice can provide you with a rhythmic awareness of God’s work in and through you to accomplish his good purpose. Consistently practice your discipline. When you fail, gently come to God and begin again.
5. A rule for life can act like a plumb line, allowing you a still point from which you can gauge the intentionality of your spiritual journey. On a regular basis look at your life in light of your rule. What do you see?
 - Where is God drawing you?
 - What is giving you life?
 - Where is your life out of control and not centered in Christ?

Resources on a Rule for Life

Living with Contradiction by Esther de Wall

The Rule of St. Benedict

Soul Feast by Marjorie Thompson

Reference

Calhoun, Adele Ahlberg *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us* (IVP Books, Illinois 2005) pages 37- 41