

Session #8

Go the Next Step to Develop a “Rule of Life”

Pre-Reading

*Skip Resolutions—Make a Rule of Life
Take heed, and keep your soul diligently,
lest you forget the things which your eyes have seen,
and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life.
— Deuteronomy 4:9 (RSV)*

I used to love making New Year’s resolutions—in fact, I loved making them far more than I enjoyed keeping them. But about eight years ago, I was introduced to the old tradition of creating a Rule of Life, and since then, it has proved to be a much better use of time and energy.

A Rule of Life contains spiritual, relational, and vocational rhythms needed to sustain the life in Christ we’ve been called to, and it doesn’t change much year in and year out. For anyone who is unfamiliar with the Rule or hasn’t created one, January 1 provides the perfect time to establish your own Rule of Life.

This year, skip resolutions—make a Rule of Life instead.

Why Create a Rule of Life?

Every Christian has a well-established pattern of living, whether it’s an intentionally developed set of commitments or an unstated set of values and practices, like praying before meals and going to church twice a month. But many of us aren’t as deliberate with our spiritual development as we are with our time and priority management at work, and our lives and relationships suffer as a result.

Amid our busy schedules, we’re constantly juggling relationships and responsibilities and often feel like we’re dropping more balls than we’re keeping in the air. When we lack a consistent and thoughtful way of doing life well, we will end up distracted and overwhelmed by life, and our spiritual and emotional growth will plateau. Few of us want to take this approach to life, but it just seems to happen. We wind up:

Scattered: Our schedule is full but doesn’t reflect our purpose and priorities.

Hurried: We’re busier than we want to be, but don’t know what to change.

Reactive: It seems we’re never in charge, always responding to demands.

Exhausted: We end each day weary and discouraged, unsure if we’ve spent it well.

My experience as a pastor has shown me that many of my friends and church members aren't undone by poor theology or a lack of biblical information. Instead, we often fail to grow spiritually because we haven't planned and made space for a deep, abiding fellowship with God.

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The lack of spiritual planning may be rooted in a lukewarm heart toward Christ, but at other times, we genuinely want to go deeper with God but don't know how to make time and space to simply be with him and gain spiritual strength for each day's challenges.

What Is a Rule of Life?

A Rule of Life is “an intentional, conscious plan to keep God at the center of everything we do. . . . The starting point and foundation of any Rule is a desire to be with God and to love him” (Scazzero, 196).

The Rule is a way to “begin with the end in mind”—to envision a sustainable, thriving walk with the Lord, in his Word, in prayer, in community, in our family, and in our work, then work backward to a set of commitments. It's not about detailed to-do lists that must be maintained. A Rule of Life instead gives you the opportunity to prayerfully discern what roles and responsibilities the Lord has given you, and to organize your life in the manner most conducive to spiritual growth and depth in him.

The Rule of Life has a rich history in Christian tradition. The Rule has been traced back to the early monastic movement in the fourth century, and the most well-known Rule was written by Benedict in the sixth century. The Rule of Saint Benedict has influenced Eastern and Western Christians for roughly 1,500 years, and many Reformers and evangelical patriarchs have practiced similar spiritual routines without the title. Lately, many Christian traditions have returned to the Rule as an antidote to our Western culture's lonely and fragmented lives. (Yes, Christians were doing 12 Rules for Life way before it was cool.)

- DECEMBER 27, 2018 | JEREMY LINNEMAN

Daily Office

Introduction

Rule of Life or Rhythm of Life is a trellis that helps us abide in Christ and become more fruitful spiritually. It is an intentional, conscious plan to keep God at the center of everything we do.

Pete Scazzero from emotionally healthy spirituality says this about a rule of life or rhythm of life, it is “an intentional plan to keep God at the centre of everything we do...the starting point and foundation of any rule is a desire to be with God and to love him.”

The goal of a Rhythm of Life is to dwell in deep communion with Christ and to be firmly anchored in our union with him. But how, when and where we practice these realities will depend greatly on many factors, including our life stage, work, and physical capacity. If you have multiple jobs or small children, your Rhythm should reflect those responsibilities. Here are four categories we want to suggest in taking the first steps in developing a rhythm of life. And as you practice them these areas may change over time.

In developing a rhythm of life, we want to think about the imagery Jesus gives us in John 15:1-5. “Remain in me as I also remain in you.”

Growing Connected

Handbook to Renewal Day by Day Debrief: What obstacles, difficulties, or success did you experience in meeting with God this week using the daily resource?

Think back over the last eight sessions. Which of the sessions have impacted you the most? Why?

Bible Study

Read Luke 14:25-30

“Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: “If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple. And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. “Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won’t you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, saying, ‘This person began to build and wasn’t able to finish.’”

The word hate is a common Hebrew exaggeration used to make a point. In what sense is Jesus asking us to “hate” our family and even our own life?

When a person carried a cross in first century Palestine, this meant they were about to be executed by the Roman authorities. In this light, what do you think might be the implications for you to “carry [your] cross” and die, especially as it relates to implementing these new skills you have learned?

How does Jesus’ story of the person building a tower illustrate the challenge before us in making long-lasting changes in our lives?

Video

Purpose: The goal of the rule of life is to create a specific plan to implement EHS into your life in order to transform your relationship with God and others.

A rule of life is like a trellis, a structure to help us grow and mature in Christ



Individual Activity

Survey

Next to each statement, write down the number that best describes where you are at:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Not at all true

Moderately true

Completely true

- ___ I am relaxed and unhurried
- ___ I am deeply aware of God's great love
- ___ I appreciate and love one person at a time
- ___ I am content amidst suffering and setbacks
- ___ I praise and promote others easily and joyfully
- ___ I am generous with my time, money and gifts
- ___ I listen for God's voice and will throughout the day
- ___ I forgive and let go of hurts
- ___ I am prudent in conversations and discernment
- ___ I am playful and able to laugh easily
- ___ I get up quickly when I fall or fail
- ___ I respond to criticism graciously

What initial thoughts do you have about your score?

Warning signs of not abiding

Often our own bodies are a better indicator of where we are at in abiding with Jesus. There are warning signs.

1. I feel anxiety in the tenseness and tightness of my body
2. I am not present or listening intently
3. I feel pressure with too much to do and too little time
4. I am rushing
5. I give quick opinions and judgements
6. I am fearful about the future
7. I am overly concerned with what others think
8. I am defensive and easily offended
9. I am preoccupied and distracted
10. I am resentful of interruptions and abrupt
11. I am manipulative, not patient
12. I am unenthusiastic or threatened by the success of others
13. I talk more than I listen.

How might God be speaking through your body today?

So how do I start this?

Step 1

Write down everything you currently do (or hope to do) that nurtures your spirit and fills you with delight (e.g. people, places, activities). Think more broadly beyond such activities as prayer, going to church, worship, and Bible reading. Your list may include, gardening, walking the dog, being in nature, talking with close friends, cooking, painting, hobbies, or any number of other possibilities. List as many as you want.

Step 2

Write down the activities you need to avoid, limit, or eliminate that pull you away from remaining anchored in Christ. This refers to avoiding certain things that impact your spirit negatively such as senselessly violent movies, excessive social media involvement, and commitments that take you beyond your limits.

Step 3

Write down the challenging “have to’s” in the next 3-6 months of your life that will impact your rhythms. (e.g. caring for aging parents, a special needs child, a demanding season of work, moving, switching jobs, beginning school, an adult child getting married).

Step 4

Which EHS skills might God be inviting you to intentionally focus on over the next three months? Write them below and who you want to use them with. Incorporate them in the rule of life grid on page 63.

Step 4

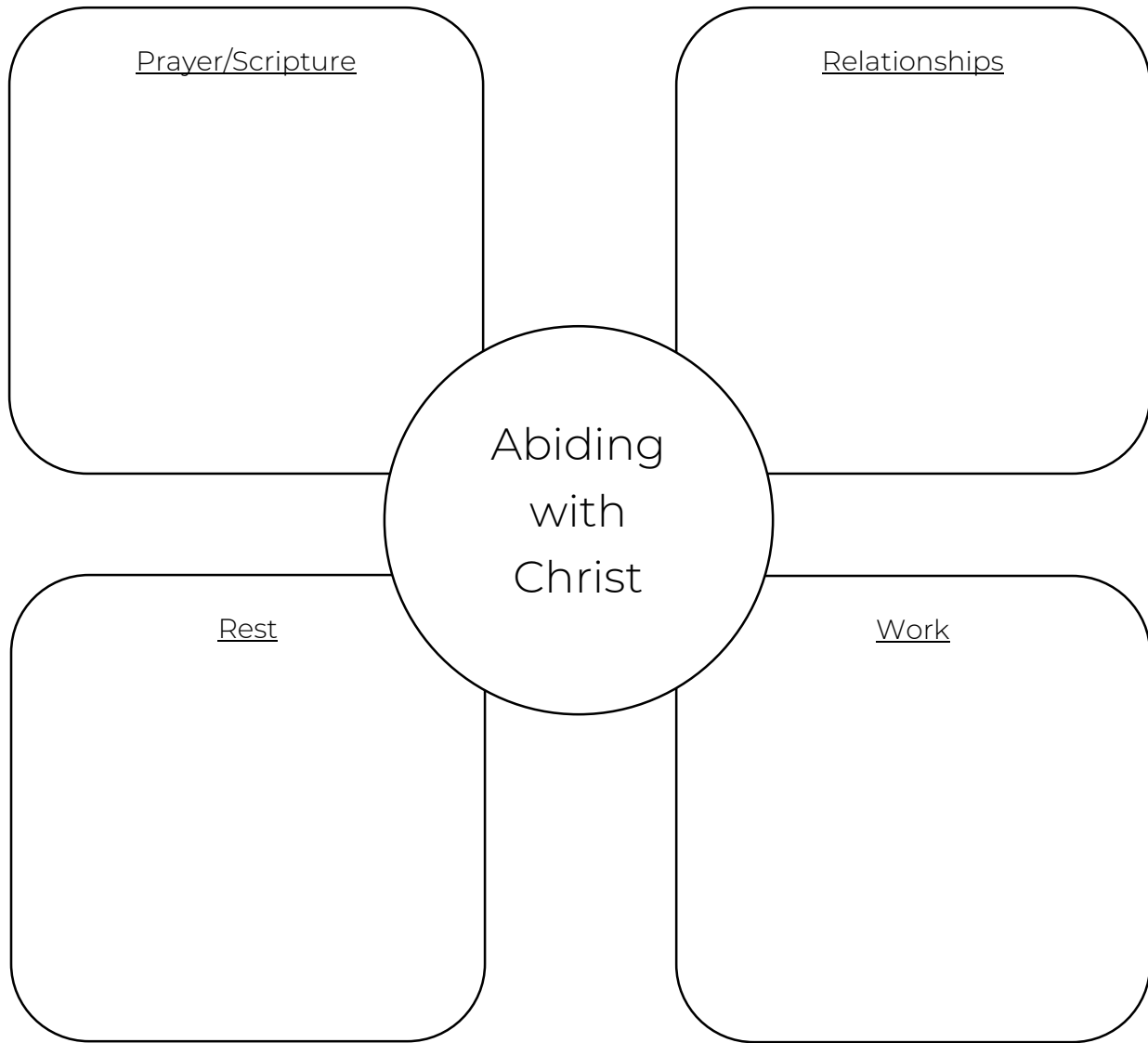
Fill in the rule of life worksheet as you consider your next 3-6 months. Ask God what he is inviting you to focus on during this season?

For the most part we have rhythm in four key areas of our lives:

1. Prayer/Scripture
2. Relationships
3. Work
4. Rest

(See Craig’s rule of life on page to help in developing yours

Develop a Rhythm of Life



Remember:

1. Listen to your heart's desires when discerning your Rhythm. God often speaks to us through them.
2. Make sure your Rhythm includes some joy, play, and fun.
3. Take baby steps. Don't make your Rhythm impossible to follow.
4. You're going to have trouble keeping a Rhythm sometimes. Recognize that you're human and try again. Unexpected things come into our lives that we can't help. We take on projects that are bigger than we expected. It takes experimentation to discern what form your Rhythm should take.
5. Figure out how much structure you need – a lot or a little.

Step 5

Take a step back and prayerfully examine your personal Rule of Life.

What is God's invitation to you today?

What is one thing you should do know?

What are the implications of this on your calendar?

Is there someone I can invite to encourage me in keeping this Rhythm?

Revisit the worksheet every few weeks to see where things need to be adjusted.

Closing

Debra Farrington in her book, *Living Faith Day by Day* writes: "Over the years I've also struggled with the amount of structure to build into a rule. People I respect deeply have detailed rules with set times for prayer, established types of prayer, and so on. They tell me that if they don't get up at 6:30 each morning and take a half hour of prayer time that they will never get to it during the day. But that doesn't work for me. It makes my spiritual life into something to add to my to-do list, and it becomes a chore and not a blessing. Over the years I have found that my rule for prayer needs to be more open-ended. I am committed to praying daily, but how and when I do that varies from day-to-day."

Personal Action Step

Continue to grow in using the HER skills.

Handbook to Renewal Day by Day: Use days 37-41

Craig's Rule of Life

