



Developing a Rule of Life

Photo by Ümit Yıldırım on Unsplash

A rule of life is a schedule and set of practices and relational rhythms that help create space in our busy world for us to be with Jesus, become like Jesus, and do what Jesus did. In other words, to live “to the full” in his kingdom and in alignment with our deepest passions.

Developing a rule of life is an ancient practice, used by communities of Christians for nearly 2000 years. The best-known example is the Rule of Saint Benedict (AD 516), which provides teaching about the basic monastic virtues of humility, silence, and obedience, as well as directives for daily living (ex. instructions on private ownership, how much food to eat). Although we do not live monastic lives, we seek what these early communities sought—a life lived in relationship with others and with God.

The meaning of “rule” comes from the Greek word for trellis. A trellis is a tool designed to enable a grapevine to get off the ground and grow upward, to become more fruitful and productive. In the same way, developing a rule of life can be the trellis that helps us abide in Christ and become more fruitful spiritually. Rather than a rigid, legalistic to-do list, it is intended to be a life-giving structure for freedom, growth, and joy. Our rule of life consists of six foundational practices: Prayer, Scripture, Friendship, Simplicity, Work, and Sabbath.

Learn more at vbchurch.ca/sermons

A good rule can set us free to be our true and best selves. It is a working document, a kind of spiritual budget, not carved in stone but subject to regular review and revision. It should support us, but never constrict us.

Margaret Guenther, Wife, Mother & Anglican Priest

How to use this workbook

This workbook is designed as a simple guide for you to develop a personal rule of life; it is not a one-size fits all list of rules to follow. Please adapt, change, and improvise as seems best to you and your community. That said, here are some initial steps:

- 01** Take a look at the Rule of Life Chart (on page 10) and spend some time contemplating it, considering how it relates to different areas of your life.
- 02** On the following pages, slowly read through each spiritual practice, paying particular attention to the questions. Give yourself time to consider how you have engaged in these practices in the past, what has worked, and what has been difficult. Imagine what a more intentional rule of life could look like for you in this season.
- 03** Draft your rule of life. Come back to the chart and fill in each category as you see fit. Do not feel pressured to “complete” this chart in one sitting... a good rule of life develops over time and will likely change as life situations change.
- 04** Spend a few weeks living into your rule and see how it feels. If it feels burdensome or boring, pay attention to this without judgment and consider what you need to change. What is working and what is not working? What is life-giving? What is draining? Talk about your emerging rule with your partner or a close friend.
- 05** Adjust your rule to what seems best and commit to it for an extended season of time (we recommend at least 3-6 months). Create space for reflection through journaling, talking with a friend, or just taking a walk and thinking about it. In what ways is an intentional rule of life helping transform you into a person of love, joy, and peace? In what ways are you becoming more like Jesus?



Prayer

The Gospel of Mark records a story in which Jesus, after a particularly busy day, withdrew to a solitary place and prayed (see Mark 1). Apparently, this was standard practice—Jesus understood that an ongoing connection with God was vital to living well. Although prayer can be difficult and confusing at times, it is worth remembering that at its most fundamental level, prayer is simply a conversation with God. What would it look like to engage in this conversation more often? What would it take to set aside regular time to be alone with God? How might this shape your day or even your life?

Examples: go for a walk each morning, literally schedule time to have coffee with God (bring coffee), set a daily alarm as a reminder to pray, learn to pray the Psalms, use the Lord's Prayer as a guide, embrace silence, create a dedicated prayer space in your house, keep a journal, pray with a friend, etc.

Recommended baseline practice: Set aside 10-15 minutes each day to be alone with God. If you have quiet space at home, use that. Otherwise, consider taking a walk. What you are aiming for is unhurried and uninterrupted time. Talk to God about whatever is on your mind. Remember to give thanks.

If you are new to this practice, we recommend the same baseline practice but doing it with another person.

Scripture

Photo by Zac Cain on Unsplash

When Jesus visited the synagogue in his hometown, he was handed a scroll of the prophet Isaiah. He found the specific place he was looking for and read words that gave definition to his mission (see Luke 4). Jesus understood his life and his mission in relation to God's word. Is this true of us? Do we know the story we are in? How are you developing a growing understanding of God's word? If someone were to hand you a Bible, would you know what to look for and where to look?

Examples: begin the day reading the Bible (not your iPhone), read a few chapters each day, link into the Varsity reading plan, memorize a Bible passage, practice a slow, contemplative reading of a short biblical text (lectio divina), study a biblical book with your community group, etc.

Recommended baseline practice: pick up the Bible (physical copy highly recommended) and read 1-2 chapters each day. Consider the following questions, ideally in conversation with a friend or with your community group:

- what stood out to you today/this week?
- was there anything confusing or troubling?
- did anything make you think differently about God?
- how might this change the way you live?

If you are new to this practice, we recommend starting with the Gospel of John and meeting with a friend to discuss what you are reading.



Friendship

Photo by Andrew Neel on Unsplash

We are relational beings, created by a relational God for relationship (see Genesis 1). With whom do we walk the way of Jesus alongside? What are we doing to create and deepen relationships of vulnerability and accountability? You may find it helpful to think through the categories of church, work/school, and family:

Examples for church: weekly meal with a community group, gathering for worship on Sunday, regular parties, serving together, pursuing relationships across generations and ethnicity, etc.

Examples for work/school: intentional “water cooler talks,” lunch once a week with a colleague or classmate, invite a co-worker (and their family) to dinner, join a work softball team, etc.

Examples for family: sitting down to dinner three nights a week, a fifteen-minute touchpoint each day with your partner, practice keeping the sabbath, a weekly parent/child date, annual vacation, family movie night or Saturday soccer match, etc.

Recommended baseline practice: commit to a weekly meal with your community group and some daily and weekly touchpoints with your spouse and children and/or closest friends.

If you are new to this practice, we recommend you start with a weekly get together with 1-2 close friends to connect at a soul level.

A black dog with white paws is lying on a tan couch, resting its head on the armrest. The dog is looking towards the camera.

Simplicity

Photo by Sergio Rodriguez on Unsplash

In one of his most well-known parables, Jesus described a farmer planting seeds. Some of those seeds fell among thorns, which Jesus described as “the worries of life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things” (see Mark 4). This is not an outlier teaching from Jesus; he taught about money and possessions more than any other single topic, recognizing the allure and the distraction. How have the worries of life and the desire for other things clouded your desire for Jesus? A life of simplicity and generosity is a core tenant of life in the kingdom. What might it look like to have less and to do less? What habits have you built into your life to unclutter your life? How are using your money and your possessions in a way that reflects the kingdom of God?

Examples: take a month “sabbatical” from purchasing things (other than groceries), for every item you purchase, give two away, find ways to minimize the number of ads you see or watch, consider downsizing, say no more often, borrow items where possible, join a “buy-nothing” group in your neighborhood, etc.

Recommended baseline practice: commit to owning less things and saying no more often. This will take time but start by eliminating impulse buying. Ensure that you have a least 3 evenings per week with no regular commitments.

If you are new to this practice, we recommend you start by noticing what you have that you no longer use or need. Consider giving this away. Let go of one existing commitment.

A close-up photograph of a person's hands typing on a laptop. The person is wearing a mustard-colored, textured knit sweater and several gold bangles on their left wrist. The laptop is open on a wooden desk. The background is softly blurred, showing a dark green wall and a stack of books.

Work

Photo by Christin Hume on Unsplash

When God created Adam and Eve, he set them in a garden to work and take care of it (see Genesis 2). Work is given to us by God as a gift, not a curse. Built into our humanity is the call to make our world more like Eden. What we do with our resources—our time, skills, capacity, and money—matters to God and to others. At its best, work is an expression of love and justice, at its worst, an expression of ambition and greed. How is your work (or the way you do your work) contributing to the kingdom of God? In what way are you empowering and/or recognizing the poor and marginalized?

Examples: embrace all work as ministry, commit to fixed hours of work (avoid overworking), dedicate time to an entrepreneurial project, volunteer, sponsor a child, read a book on the spirituality of work, etc.

Recommended baseline practice: commit to spending several hours each day devoted to your most important work. Explore giving away a minimum of ten percent of your gross income, with special attention to the church and the poor.

If you are new to this practice, we recommend you start with setting aside a percentage of your income to give away (your choice), and doing a weekly act of love through your work.



Sabbath

Photo by Thomas Park on Unsplash

Woven into the very fabric of creation, God rested. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore, the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy (see Genesis 1). Isaiah calls the Sabbath a delight. Jesus refers to it as a gift made for people. In a culture that seems to value endless activity and the constant need to be (digitally) connected, the Sabbath is not only embracing this rich tradition, but also vital to our soul. What would it look like to carve out a day of rest, a day to focus on God with others? Keeping the Sabbath is an act of trust, a reminder that our work does not depend on us. In the words of Abraham Heschel, “the Sabbath teaches all beings whom to praise.”

Examples: set aside regular work (job, housework, errands), disconnect from technology for a minimum of 6 hours, go for a long walk, gather with others to worship, gather with others to feast, read, take a nap, savor a good cup of coffee or glass of wine, etc.

Recommended baseline practice: set aside 24 hours each week. Turn off your phone (only answer calls from friends and family) and spend more time resting, focusing on the things of God, and with friends and family. Avoid shopping or running errands.

If you are new to this practice, we recommend experimenting with a shorter block of time, for example 3-4 hours. Gradually increase this to a full day of rest.

Rule of Life Chart

Goal	Practice	Plan	
Be with Jesus	Prayer	Daily and / or Weekly	
	Scripture	Daily and / or Weekly	
Become like Jesus	Friendship	Daily and / or Weekly	
	Simplicity	Daily and / or Weekly	
Do what Jesus did	Work	Daily and / or Weekly	
	Sabbath	Daily and / or Weekly	

Spiritual Formation is the activity of the Holy Spirit which moulds our lives into the likeness of Jesus Christ. This likeness is one of deep intimacy with God and genuine compassion for all of creation. The Spirit works not only in the lives of individuals but also in the church, shaping it into the Body of Christ.

We cooperate with this work of the Spirit through certain practices that make us more open and responsive to the Spirit's touch.

Further Resources

Bridgetown Church

Much of this booklet was a reformatted (or stolen) from Bridgetown Church in Portland. They have some excellent material on developing a rule of life.

<https://bridgetown.church/series/unhurrying-with-a-rule-of-life>

New Life Fellowship

Take a look at the rule of life from New Life Fellowship in NYC. It's simple, flexible, and helpful. Click on the link and scroll down to "Our Marks."

<https://newlife.nyc/vision>

The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry

A very good book by John Mark Comer that explores our need to slow down. Comer argues that we "ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your life. Hurry is the great enemy of the spiritual life." Great stuff. He then provides helpful suggestions on how to get there. Available to borrow from the office.

The Rule of Saint Benedict

The classic example of a rule of life. For fifteen centuries Benedictine monasticism has been governed by a Rule that is at once strong enough to instill order and yet flexible enough to have relevance fifteen-hundred years later. It challenges how we view possessions, how we receive guests, as well as advice on what monks to avoid. What's not to love?!

**Above all else, guard your heart,
for everything you do flows from it.**

Proverbs 4:23