

A WELL-ORDERED LIFE

CULTIVATING A RULE OF LIFE



Session One | What Is a Rule of Life?

A Rule of Life is a set of practices, habits, and guide rails intentionally and harmoniously interwoven into the fabric of your everyday life to help you remain centered on Jesus Christ.

Everyone already has a rule of life - rules and practices that build the habits that we value.

Is your Rule one that is driving you toward a life *you* have decided to build or one that is modeled by Jesus?

“So here’s what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don’t become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You’ll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.” || Romans 12:1-2, MSG

“I am the true grapevine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch of mine that doesn’t produce fruit, and he prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more. You have already been pruned and purified by the message I have given you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me.

“Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing. Anyone who does not remain in me is thrown away like a useless branch and withers. Such branches are gathered into a pile to be burned. But if you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask for anything you want, and it will be granted! When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father.” || John 15:1-8, NLT



Building a Rule of Life is a way we examine different areas of our lives, hold them to the litmus test of Jesus, and implement spiritual practices that allow God to begin to shape that area to look more like His life.

Takeaways

- We **need** to stay connected to Jesus. He is the vine, we are the branches. In Him is life, fruitfulness and protection.
- Connection with Him requires **constant** care and attention.

Reflect

- Where have we allowed ourselves to become disconnected from God?
- Where has routine taken over our relationship with Him?
- Where have we become complacent?

Notes

For Further Study

A Rule of Life is a set of practices, habits, and guide rails that help to focus all parts of our life around Jesus. Though the phrase itself never appears in Scripture, the concept is deeply biblical. The Bible, in fact, has a lot to say about developing habits for a spiritual purpose.

Read 1 Corinthians 9:24-27:

24 *Don't you realize that in a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize? So run to win!* **25** *All athletes are disciplined in their training. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize.* **26** *So I run with purpose in every step. I am not just shadowboxing.* **27** *I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should. Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified.* || **1 Corinthians 9:24-27, NLT**

What does this passage say is the purpose of an athlete's training?

What does Paul say is the purpose of his training?

How does this passage help you better understand the process and purpose of developing a Rule of Life?

Read Proverbs 22:6.

6 *Direct your children onto the right path,
and when they are older, they will not leave it.* || **Proverbs 22:6, NLT**

How do you think the role of a parent training up and directing a child relates to developing a Rule of Life?





Session Two | What It Looks Like

13 "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. **14** But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it. || **Matthew 7:13-14, NIV**

Key Characteristics of a Rule of Life

First, a Rule of Life must penetrate your **thoughts**, your **heart** and your **actions**.

The Christian life is one of constant self-reflection.

Second, a Rule of Life should not be used to take **control** of your spiritual life, but rather should **inform** you about and **aid** you in the areas where you do not have control of your refinement.

Third, a Rule of Life seeks to establish **daily, weekly, monthly** and even **yearly** practices.

Notes



BEGIN SLOWLY

Start to build your Rule of Life slowly lest you become overwhelmed or impatiently take back control.

Matthew 11:28-30, NIV

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Mike Cosper, *Recapturing the Wonder*

"A life of prayer, fasting, and spiritual disciplines can easily become a life of empty religious effort if the goal isn't communion with God. We don't need self improvement, we need to come home."

TAKE STOCK AND SUBTRACT

Building a Rule of Life begins with taking stock of your current habits and practices, and then subtracting that which is leading you away from God. Assess the areas of strain, stress and drain, and start to take things out.

Reflect: *What areas of your life does God feel the most absent from? Where are His values lacking from your life?*

Galatians 5:22-23, NIV

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law."

Reflect

- How do the markers of a Rule of Life differ from a typical 'self-improvement plan'?
- Robby read the verses from Matthew describing how a life with Christ feels: restful, gentle, and light. In your experience, does life with Christ feel this way? Why or why not?

For Further Study

Self-reflection is critical to the process of developing a Rule of Life. It requires being honest with ourselves about areas of neglect or rebellion in our lives so that we can surrender those places to God and allow Him to form us.

Paul, in the book of Galatians, contrasts what it looks like to live outside the will of God with what God's Spirit intends to form in us.

Read Galatians 5:19-23:

19 *When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, **20** idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, **21** envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these. Let me tell you again, as I have before, that anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God.*

22 *But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, **23** gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things! || Galatians 5:19-23, NLT*

What do you notice about who produces the first list compared with who produces the second list?

Reread the passage slowly and take time for self-reflection. Is there an area of your life that needs to be surrendered to God? If nothing comes to mind, pause and ask God to reveal any blind spots you might have.





Session Three | Community

"The Bible knows nothing of a religion defined by what a person does inwardly in the privacy of thought or feeling, or apart from others on lonely retreat. When Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment was He said 'Love the Lord your God with all your passion and prayer and intelligence' and then immediately before anyone could go off and make a religion out of it, riveted it to another, 'There is a second to set alongside it: "Love others as well as you love yourself."'

|| Eugene Peterson

"By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." **|| John 13:35, ESV**

**You can't
demonstrate this
type of captive love
in isolation.**

**You can only
demonstrate it in
the context of
community.**

Living out a Rule of Life within the context of community comes down to **intentionality**.

Our hope is that this Rule of Life would transform not only your **life** and your **family**, but also our entire **church**.

Spiritual Practices in this Series

- Prayer
- Sabbath
- Stewardship
- Silence and Solitude
- Community
- Scripture
- Fasting and Simplicity
- Evangelism and Hospitality



"We must not forget the final apologetic. The world has a right to look upon us as we, as true Christians, come to practical differences, and it should be able to observe that we do love each other. Our love must have a form that the world may observe; it must be seeable."

|| Francis Schaeffer

Reflect

- How do you imagine community to look within your Rule of Life?
- What seems enticing or off-putting about building practices with others?
- Who could you invite to take this journey towards a Rule of Life with you?

Notes

For Further Study

Community is crucial to developing a Rule of Life. It's meant to be done alongside others. We see this reflected in the early Church.

Read Acts 2:42-47 and pay attention to the communal language:

42 *All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper, and to prayer.*

43 *A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. 44 And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. 45 They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need. 46 They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity— 47 all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved. || Acts 2:42-47, NLT*

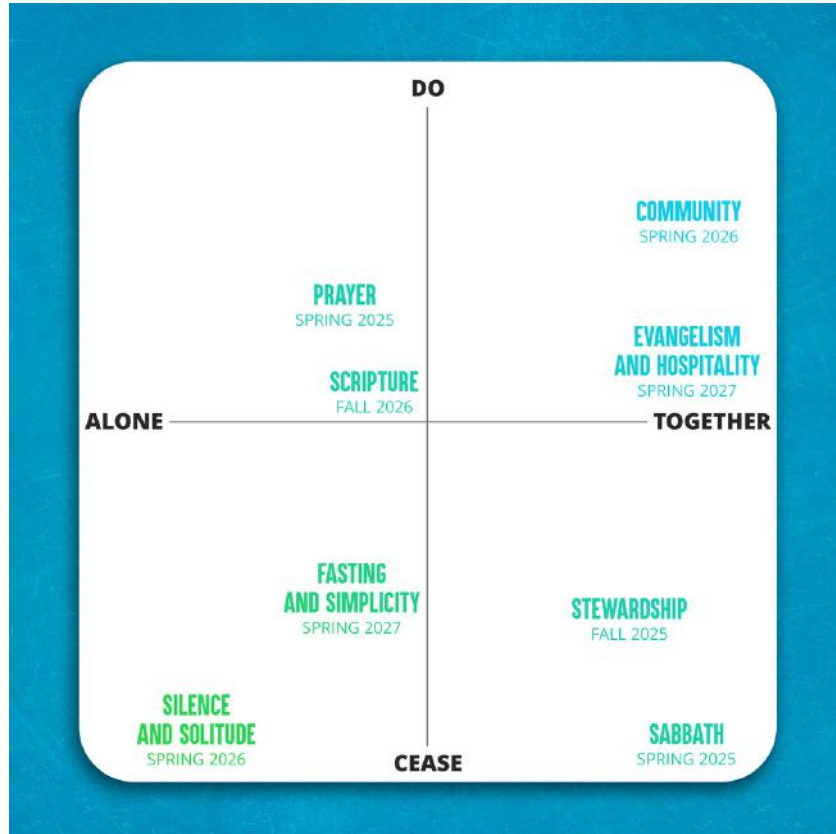
What practices does this passage tell us the community was engaged in?

What does it tell us was the result of these practices?





Session Four | Ceasing and Doing



SABBATH

CEASING || TOGETHER

Sabbath is a weekly, 24-hour period dedicated to ceasing our work, resisting control, resting our bodies, and delighting in God's goodness

It is a weekly reminder that our spiritual formation depends on God.

PRAYER

DOING || ALONE

Prayer is defined by talking to, listening to, and being with God.

We aim to cultivate a prayer life that is steeped in an experience of God that leads to a craving for more time with Him.



STEWARDSHIP

CEASING || TOGETHER

Biblical stewardship involves the privilege and responsibility of taking care of what rightly belongs to God. This includes our money, our bodies, our time, and the spiritual gifts He has given us.

COMMUNITY

DOING || TOGETHER

A Rule of Life is meant to characterize a community of Christ-followers. It highlights what that community believes about God and how they've chosen to embody the Kingdom of God in their work, devotion, relationships and witness.

SILENCE & SOLITUDE

CEASING || ALONE

Retreating from noise, deadlines and people gives us time and space to give God our full attention. In silence and solitude, we can examine our lives in the presence of God and allow Him to speak into them as He wishes.

SCRIPTURE

DOING || ALONE

God's word gives us instant access to the voice of God. Through it, God is able to reveal Himself to us, and give us insight into His will for our lives. It's vital that we read it regularly and know how to encounter God through it.

Notes

FASTING AND SIMPLICITY

CEASING || ALONE

The Christian life often involves showing restraint - saying "no" to anything that distracts us from God or would seek to lead us away from Him. Practicing fasting and simplicity builds our ability to resist temptation while also affording us unique spaces to experience God's provision and presence.

EVANGELISM AND HOSPITALITY

DOING || TOGETHER

A Rule of Life should be for the blessing of God and the blessing of others. The practices of evangelism and hospitality extend God's love in both word and deed.



"Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly." || **Matthew 28:11-30, MSG**

Notes

Rule of Life practices should come from the life of Jesus. We are not merely imitating Him, however.

Rather, we're participating with Him, being transformed by Him in our practice.

The practices do not change us; Jesus does.



COMMUNITY

A Rule of Life is a communal way of life.

Eugene Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*

The Bible knows nothing of a religion defined by what a person does inwardly in the privacy of thought or feeling, or apart from others on lonely retreat. When Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment was He said “Love the Lord your God with all your passion and prayer and intelligence” and then immediately before anyone could go off and make a religion out of it, riveted it to another, “There is a second to set alongside it: “Love others as well as you love yourself.”

John 13:35, ESV

“By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

To practice a communal Rule of Life:

- Get on the same page other Christ-followers.
- Invite others to participate alongside you.
- Persevere in your practice, and help others to do the same.

Reflect

- What practice(s) are you most looking forward to exploring, and why?
- Do you have any experience with any of the practices mentioned today? If so, describe that experience.
- What do you anticipate being your largest roadblock to seeing a Rule of Life through?

Notes

For Further Study

This series comprises eight separate studies covering the following practices: Sabbath, prayer, stewardship, silence and solitude, community, Scripture, fasting and simplicity, and evangelism and hospitality. Each of these practices are rooted in the Bible.

Read the following examples of where you find each one.

Sabbath

8 *“Remember to observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. **9** You have six days each week for your ordinary work, **10** but the seventh day is a Sabbath day of rest dedicated to the Lord your God. On that day no one in your household may do any work. This includes you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, your livestock, and any foreigners living among you. **11** For in six days the Lord made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and everything in them; but on the seventh day he rested. That is why the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and set it apart as holy. || Exodus 20:8-11, NLT*

Prayer

6 *Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. || Philippians 4:6, NLT*

Stewardship

6 *Remember this—a farmer who plants only a few seeds will get a small crop. But the one who plants generously will get a generous crop. **7** You must each decide in your heart how much to give. And don’t give reluctantly or in response to pressure. “For God loves a person who gives cheerfully.” || 2 Corinthians 9:6-7, NLT*

Silence and Solitude

10 *“Be still, and know that I am God!
I will be honored by every nation.
I will be honored throughout the world.” || Psalm 46:10, NLT*

13 *As soon as Jesus heard the news, he left in a boat to a remote area to be alone. || Matthew 14:13, NLT*





Community

24 Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. **25** And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near. || **Hebrews 10:24-25, NLT**



Scripture

16 All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. **17** God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work. || **2 Timothy 3:16-17, NLT**



Fasting and Simplicity

16 "And when you fast, don't make it obvious, as the hypocrites do, for they try to look miserable and disheveled so people will admire them for their fasting. I tell you the truth, that is the only reward they will ever get. **17** But when you fast, comb your hair and wash your face. **18** Then no one will notice that you are fasting, except your Father, who knows what you do in private. And your Father, who sees everything, will reward you. || **Matthew 6:16-18, NLT**

Evangelism and Hospitality

18 Jesus came and told his disciples, "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. **19** Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. **20** Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age." || **Matthew 28:18-20, NLT**

Having read these passages, what stood out to you the most?

Of all of these practices we'll be going through in the coming years, which are you most excited to take? Why? Which are you most nervous about? Why do you think that is?



Session Five | Self-Reflection

Before beginning to develop a Rule of Life, spend time thinking about and reflecting on where you are now.

Take stock of the rhythms you already have.

Consider what needs to come out of your life.

22 "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law."

|| Galatians 5:22-23, NIV

Getting Started

- **Keep learning** about a Rule of Life by checking out the recommended resources at the end of this workbook.
- **Study** the life of Jesus by reading one of the four biographies of Jesus In the New Testament (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John).
- **Invite** someone to join you on this journey.

For Further Study

Developing a Rule of Life is about bringing God into every aspect of our lives. It's not just about adding an ever-growing list of "spiritual" or "churchy" things.

Listen to and reflect on Jesus's words:

"Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly." || **Matthew 11:28-30, MSG**

What does Jesus say is His intent for our lives in this passage?

How does His vision here impact your perspective on developing a Rule of Life?

Examine yourselves to see if your faith is genuine. Test yourselves. Surely you know that Jesus Christ is among you; if not, you have failed the test of genuine faith. || **2 Corinthians 13:5, NLT**

Take time to examine the spiritual rhythms you already have in place. What are they?

Before diving into a brand new spiritual practice, are there simple ways you can begin inviting God into your everyday life right now?





Session Six | Closing Thoughts

"We become a community of rest in a culture of hurry and exhaustion through the practice of Sabbath. We become a community of communion with God in a culture of distraction and escapism through a practice of prayer. We become a community of courageous fidelity to orthodoxy in a culture of ideological compromise through the practice of scripture" || **Practicing the Way**

"It is not your love that sustains the marriage, but from now on, the marriage that sustains your love." || **Dietrich Bonhoeffer**

Notes

For Further Study

A Rule of Life will not ever take hold without commitment because, let's be honest, there will be days and times when we simply don't feel like doing these spiritual practices. But our feelings are fleeting and not a reliable basis for our relationship with God (though that's not to say our relationship with God ought to be void of emotion).

These spiritual practices that comprise a Rule of Life are intended to develop within us an ever-deepening love for God and others, but that begins by remembering that God loved us first.

Read this passage from 1 John and reflect on God's love for and commitment to us:

***1** See how very much our Father loves us, for he calls us his children, and that is what we are! But the people who belong to this world don't recognize that we are God's children because they don't know him. **2** Dear friends, we are already God's children, but he has not yet shown us what we will be like when Christ appears. But we do know that we will be like him, for we will see him as he really is. **3** And all who have this eager expectation will keep themselves pure, just as he is pure...*

***16** We know what real love is because Jesus gave up his life for us. So we also ought to give up our lives for our brothers and sisters. **17** If someone has enough money to live well and sees a brother or sister in need but shows no compassion—how can God's love be in that person?*

18** Dear children, let's not merely say that we love each other; let us show the truth by our actions. **19** Our actions will show that we belong to the truth, so we will be confident when we stand before God. **20** Even if we feel guilty, God is greater than our feelings, and he knows everything. || **1 John 3:1-3, 16-20 NLT

Based on this passage, what are ways in which we see how God has loved us?

How would remembering that help you develop a deeper love for God and for others? What are a couple of things you could do to help you remember?





Additional Notes



RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Rule of Life (General)

- [Ruth Haley Barton, *Sacred Rhythms*](#)
 - [John Mark Comer, *Practicing the Way*](#)
 - [John Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted*](#)
 - [Richard Foster, *The Celebration of Discipline*](#)
 - [Eugene Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*](#)
 - [Justin Whitmel Earley, *The Common Rule*](#)
 - [Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God*](#)
 - The Rules of [Saint Benedict](#) or [Saint Augustine](#)
 - *Rule of Life Podcast*
 - *Practicing the Way Podcast*
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To get a head start on the first practice we'll cover (Sabbath):

- [John Mark Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*](#)
- [Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Sabbath*](#)
- [Ruth Haley Barton, *Embracing Rhythms of Work and Rest*](#)
- [Walter Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance*](#)
- [Shelly Miller, *Rhythms of Rest*](#)
- [Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*](#)
- [A.J. Swoboda, *Subversive Sabbath*](#)

