



04 | CREATING A RULE OF LIFE

All important parts of life require **planning**. A lack of planning almost guarantees a lack of good development. This is true of **sports, child development, education, and retirement**. It is also true of our **growth in Christ**. Paul said as much in I Corinthians 9:27:

“But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.”



RULES OF LIFE

The word *rule* derives from the Latin word *regula*, from which we get words like “regular” and “regulate.” Having a Rule of Life is a way to organize your life to ensure that you are doing what is necessary to keep your faith growing and your character strengthening.

A **Rule of Life** really centers around two questions, which it combines into a third question:

<p>WHO DO I WANT TO BE? + HOW DO I WANT TO LIVE?</p> <hr/> <p>HOW DO I WANT TO LIVE SO I CAN BECOME WHO I WANT TO BE?</p>

DEVELOPING YOUR PERSONAL RULE OF LIFE

Every person’s Rule of Life will be a bit different, as each of us have our own life situations, schedules, strengths, and weaknesses; all of which should be considered as we lay out a plan for how we want to live. A good Rule of Life is thoughtful about life rhythms **daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly, and yearly**. Here are some questions you should ponder in thinking about what elements you want to include and how often.

NOTE: *EVERYONE IS OVERLY AMBITIOUS ABOUT WHAT THEY CAN INCORPORATE INTO A RULE OF LIFE ON THEIR FIRST ATTEMPT. MAKE A FIRST PLAN, SHOW YOURSELF GRACE AS YOU IMPLEMENT, AND PLAN TO MAKE SOME ADJUSTMENTS TO YOUR STRATEGY AS YOU GO.*

1. When I want to be closer to God, what do I typically find most helpful?

When you put a plant near a window, you have to rotate it fairly regularly to keep the plant from becoming lopsided. Why? **Because plants grow towards what give them life.**

We are no different.

Begin by thinking about what for you is **life-giving**.

A typical list of *personal* spiritual disciplines would include: Solitude and silence, prayer, contemplative reading of Scripture, examination of your conscience, confession, honoring your physical body (health & exercise), sabbath and fasting, journaling and time in Christian community.



"FOR I KNOW MY
TRANSGRESSIONS, AND MY
SIN IS EVER BEFORE ME."
PSALM 51:3

2. What are problem areas in my life, and how can I change them or redeem them?

All of us struggle with sin, and with tendencies that make us weaker in our faith. Most of us are painfully aware of what sins we struggle with. In addition to allowing time to pray about and repent of our shortcomings, it can be helpful to search for disciplines that **move us to do the opposite of what weakens us.**

For example, if you struggle deeply with gossip, it would be worth having deliberate time set aside to be silent in God's presence, practicing the virtue of holding your tongue. If you spend a great deal of time fretting over relationships and how other people bother you, it would be good to have time set aside for regular self-examination where you focus more on what needs to be kept in order within your own life, and how you might affect others.

Another approach is to think about how we can learn to **harness what is affecting us negatively in a way that helps us to grow**. For example, a young parent might have *very* little opportunity for solitude or silence. The constant activity of young children could be a hindrance to spiritual growth, if the parent is seeking to grow primarily through silence and solitude. But if instead, the parent re-imagines time spent with children, it can be a source of growth. "Children are close to the heart of God, and when I spend time paying attention to how my children's hearts work, it helps me to understand God's heart better."



3. What activities will stretch me as a Christian?

This relates to question 1. Most of us have areas toward which we **naturally gravitate**. Introverted people find the disciplines of silence, solitude, and reflection very appealing. Extroverted people find fellowship, worship, and acts of service more appealing.

In addition to making time for what you naturally like to do, **it is helpful to think about what areas of spiritual growth come less naturally to you**, and commit to regularly **experimenting** with one or two of them regularly, as a challenge to yourself.

The introvert may need to have a time each month where he or she experiences deeper fellowship with other Christians, or is involved in acts of service that require being out and about. The extrovert may need to learn how to be alone with God, with times of deeper reflection on Scripture.

4. When in my life can I realistically make more space for God?

What are the **natural rhythms of your life and work schedule**? Yours might be a *daily* routine. Some of us have work-weeks that function in more of a *weekly* rhythm. Perhaps your deadlines make your life move along the beat of a *monthly, quarterly, or annual* pulse.

Think about what times of the day you can start living differently. Do you greet God when you wake up each morning, or do you head straight for Facebook? How about meal times? Bed time?

What days of the week could be reclaimed as opportunities for growth? Are there other scheduled events in the year around which you should plan to spend more time?

HAVE YOU EVER CONSIDERED
SCHEDULING A PERSONAL
SPIRITUAL RETREAT?

EVEN A HALF-DAY CAN BE A
CONSIDERABLE RECHARGE!

5. Who will hold me accountable for growing in Christ?

As you develop a plan for how you want to live, it is important to have a person or two to whom you will be accountable for living by this plan. This is not to be a rigid, legalistic endeavor, but a **flexible** one, where you do the best you can, knowing that even if you miss some of your plan some of the time, you are still moving in a better direction because you have done so deliberately.

Is there a person you could get with regularly for mutual friendship/sharing/ mentoring as you both strive to be better Christians?

DEVELOPING A PERSONAL RULE OF LIFE

TAKE A FEW MINUTES TO RESPOND BELOW TO THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS. FEEL FREE TO BLEND ANSWERS BETWEEN THEM IF APPROPRIATE. USE THIS SPACE TO HELP YOU FORM A BRIEF SELF-ASSESSMENT.

1. WHAT TYPICALLY HELPS ME MOST IN GROWING CLOSER TO GOD?
2. WHAT ARE PROBLEM AREAS FOR ME NEEDING TO BE CHANGED OR REDEEMED?
3. WHAT SPIRITUAL PRACTICES WOULD STRETCH ME AS A CHRISTIAN?
4. WHEN IN MY LIFE COULD I REALISTICALLY MAKE MORE SPACE FOR GOD?
5. ARE THERE OBVIOUS PLACES IN MY LIFE'S RHYTHM WHERE I COULD BE MORE INTENTIONAL?
6. WHO COULD HELP HOLD ME ACCOUNTABLE FOR MY PLANS TO GROW?

A few tips as you work on your Rule of Life:

1. It is totally fine if much of your Rule of Life consists of the **things you do already**. Include things like daily rituals and church attendance. Don't feel a need to put tons of new stuff. In fact, it's fine if many of the categories on yours are blank.
2. **Pick an area**. Rather than try to stretch yourself in 3-4 areas, just settle for one. Whether it's a regular act of caring or devotion, if it's a positive change you successfully implement, that would be a huge accomplishment for one year. Next year you can tweak an existing one or add another. Keep it simple.
3. Remember: **Baby steps**. Unless it's something huge that *has* to be cut out or changed, make whatever you change look like a baby step; something you are more than capable of actually implementing.

SAMPLE RULE OF LIFE

Rules of Life can be as varied as human beings are! Here is one sample of how you might approach the task.

DAILY I will strive to:

- Start each morning with a prayer or devotional reading
- Pause to pray before opening my computer at work
- Have a conversation with my spouse before we go to sleep about how each of us is doing, and pray together

WEEKLY I will strive to:

- Attend worship in person
- Attend a Bible class or life group for connections and discussion
- Make at least one entry in my prayer journal
- Check on an older relative, or someone I know who needs encouragement via email or text

MONTHLY I will strive to:

- Take my children to do something service-oriented, whether making treats to deliver to someone, making cards or drawings to send to someone, or some other project as we see opportunity.

QUARTERLY I will strive to:

- Set aside at least one afternoon to review my Rule of Life, read over my prayer journal, and consider how things are going.

YEARLY I will strive to:

- Take at least one or two nights as a personal retreat to go hiking, reconnect with God, and reflect on my life.

DEVELOPING A PERSONAL RULE OF LIFE

My Personal Plan

THE GOAL IS NOT TO OVERBURDEN YOURSELF OR TO FILL EVERY POSSIBLE GAP IN YOUR LIFE WITH A PLANNED SPIRITUAL PRACTICE. THINK IN TERMS OF BABY STEPS. WHAT COULD YOU IMPLEMENT INTO YOUR LIFE THAT WILL HELP YOU GROW TOWARD YOUR GOAL OF BEING MORE LIKE JESUS? FILL IN CONTENT IN THE SPACES THAT MAKE SENSE FOR YOU. IT'S OK TO HAVE SOME EMPTY PLACES. NOTE: IF YOU USE A CALENDAR, BE SURE TO PLUG IN WHAT PARTS OF THIS PLAN THAT YOU ARE ABLE!

DAILY I will strive to:

WEEKLY I will strive to:

MONTHLY I will strive to:

QUARTERLY I will strive to:

YEARLY I will strive to: