



## Communal Habits as a Contemporary Rule of Life<sup>1</sup>

The word *rule* is used because it comes from the Latin word *regula*, a word associated with a trellis, the woodwork on which a plant grows. The idea is that we (like plants) are always growing and changing. But when there is no order, growth can take something that was supposed to produce fruit and turn it into a twisted vine of decay.

Anyone who stops to think about it comes to the same realization—humans are largely defined by the small routines that make up our days and weeks. Author Annie Dillard wrote, “How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives. What we do with this hour, and that one, is what we are doing. A schedule defends from chaos and whim. It is a net for catching days. It is a scaffolding on which a worker can stand and labor with both hands at sections of time.”

The best way to understand a “rule of life” or a program of habits is by practicing Dillard’s scaffolding, her version of the trellis. Habits are how we stand up and get our hands on time. And because time is the currency of our purpose, habits are how we get our hands on our purpose. If you want to get your hands on who you are becoming, you need to get your hands on habits. Understanding this insight, monastic orders have for millennia lived according to rules of life for the purpose of unifying head and habit.

All those who want to be attentive to who they are becoming must realize that formation begins with a framework of habits. Only when your habits are constructed to match your worldview do you become someone who doesn’t just know about God and neighbor but someone who actually loves God and neighbor.

---

<sup>1</sup> Excerpt from *The Common Rule*, pg. 14-16

---

## Crafting a Rule of Life<sup>2</sup>

### **STEP 1 | Write down where you experience joy in different domains of life.**

List what fills you with delight. Often when we think of answering how we experience joy we limit ourselves to what we consider spiritual activities. The four areas of “nurture habits” help expand our imagination where we can experience growth: Prayer, Rest, Work/Activity, Relationships

### **Step 2 | List habits to limit or eliminate because they constrict joy.**

Reflect on habits that pull you away from abiding in the love of God. This list does not require the activity to be inherently evil or assumed as addictive. It is something you know impacts you negatively. Consider what practices could confront those habits and will cultivate joy.

### **Step 3 | Reflect on the four areas of prayer, rest, work/activity, and relationships.**

The four areas of prayer, rest, work/activity, and relationships could overlap but encourage an integrated life through different aspects of life. Consider what area is difficult for you to establish habits.

### **Step 4 | Acknowledge the reality and challenges of this season of life that impact your daily rhythms.**

You may be currently parenting small children, in a demanding season at work, caring for aging parents, or recovering from an illness, death, or divorce. All of these factors construct the reality you are living in. Don't make your Rule of Life impossible to follow.

### **Step 5 | Limit your Rule of Life to a few daily, weekly, monthly, or annual practices for each domain.**

Do not have more than 1-2 Daily, Weekly, Monthly, or Annual practices for each domain to begin. A Rule of Life must be realistic in order to be life giving. A Rule of Life is not an ideal you strive towards, it is a foundation you do not want your life to exist without

---

<sup>2</sup> Adapted from Sacred Grace [<https://www.thesacredgrace.com/rule-of-life>]

---

**Step 6 | Read your Rule of Life regularly.**

Make a practice of reading your Rule of Life regularly. It may be a weekly practice to help realign your habits each week. Consider keeping your Rule of Life written inside a journal or at your desk as a reminder to arrange your day to experience the joy and love of God.

**Step 7 | Clarify how you will continually live into your Rule of Life.**

Revisit your Rule of Life to review and revise it to the season of life you are in.

## Recommended Books

- ❖ The Common Rule: Habits of Purpose for an Age of Distraction - Justin Whitmel Earley
- ❖ God in My Everything: How an Ancient Rhythm Helps Busy People Enjoy God - Ken Shigematsu
- ❖ Divine Hours - Phyllis Tickle
- ❖ Seeking God's Face: Praying with the Bible Through the Year
- ❖ Emotionally Healthy Discipleship - Pete Scazzero
- ❖ The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry - John Mark Comer